2007

# Student perceptions of power : a critical exploration of power in the classroom

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# STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF POWER:
# A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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August 2007

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF POWER:
A CRITICAL LOOK AT POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

By Karen M. Williams

The majority of instructional communication research on power defines it as a tool teachers use to control student behavior, suggesting that student responses in the classroom are directly attributable to a teacher's use of power. Missing from this research are student perceptions of power, and how those perceptions actually affect the choices they make in the classroom. This study focused on getting those missing perceptions.

Findings of focus group interviews with undergraduate students and graduate teaching associates suggest that, while some of the choices students make in the classroom are affected by teachers, most of their decisions and motivation come from outside the classroom. In addition, findings indicate that student understandings of power and resistance reflect the predominant discourse on power; that it is "possessed" and used to control, an understanding that serves to reify a hierarchical, oppositional relationship between teachers and students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whose inspiration, encouragement, and support greatly contributed to the completion of this thesis. First of all, without Dr. Jo Sprague's critique of instructional communication's research on power in the classroom, I would not have been inspired to write on the topic. It was Dr. Deanna Fassett who assigned the reading of Dr. Sprague's articles, and who introduced me to critical communication pedagogy. Deanna's passion for, and example of, critical communication pedagogy inspired me to not only to write about it, but to incorporate critical communication pedagogy into my own teaching methods. Also, without Deanna's encouragement and guidance, this thesis would not have made it through to completion.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Anne Marie Todd and Dr. Jay Baglia, whose enthusiasm and support for the topic kept me energized, and suggestions and challenges pushed me to go further in my exploration of power, which helped create a stronger thesis.

I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my colleagues in the GTA program; their camaraderie, humor, and friendship brought lightness to what may otherwise have been a very stressful year.

Thanks to my family whose love and support are a constant source of inspiration, and what made it possible for me to return to graduate school in the first place.

Finally, I want to thank Gurumayi Chidvilasananda whose teachings and practices of Siddha Yoga inspire, uplift, support, and enrich my life. Studying the teachings and participating in the practices of meditation and yoga help me remain anchored in the power within my self and keep me afloat as I navigate the sometimes tumultuous river of life.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The fact that my thesis topic is "power in the classroom from a critical perspective" is itself testament to the great influence critical pedagogy can have on a student. My original focus in the communication studies graduate program was organizational communication. My professional experience was in this area; I had held various managerial positions related to communications, most recently Director of Public Relations and Communication for a non-profit organization in New York, a role that included a great deal of training. When I moved back to California, I planned to do private consulting and training and so decided to get a master's degree to gain the theoretical foundation to support my professional experience as well as provide credibility to this endeavor.

Based on my professional experience, I was very interested in the way leaders inspired and engaged employees. In my own experience as a manager I discovered that this had to do with providing both clear communication of goals and expectations, and including employees in the formation and creation of those goals and expectations. I had begun researching communication-based leadership theory and thinking about how I might focus a thesis when I took a seminar in communication education. In this seminar, not only did the professor include critical pedagogy in the course content, she modeled it in her own pedagogical practices. I was very inspired by this philosophy; it seemed to align well with the way I approached employee engagement. I was also inspired by the reflexivity that was encouraged; over the course of the semester, I felt compelled to look at how my life as a privileged, white, middle class, educated female shaped how I viewed

the world, and the ways this view could unknowingly and unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of racism, sexism, hegemony, elitism, and other oppressive structures. This awareness had a significant impact on me, and helped to free me from some limited thinking. Needless to say, my personal experience inspired me to change my focus, and it also demonstrates the transformational power of incorporating a critical perspective in the classroom.

It actually wasn't until I read studies on power in the classroom, studies I perceived to be completely antithetic to critical pedagogy, that I became inspired to focus specifically on power and resistance. It was unbelievable to me that behavioral-based studies made up the predominant discourse in our field on the subject. I believe there are many problems with this approach to the study of power, one of which is the fact that the basis of behaviorist research is the positivist paradigm, which assumes an objective reality that one can know through observation and empirical processes alone. Using this paradigm in communication research reduces communication to a transmission model; a sender transmits a message to a designated receiver. In instructional communication research on power in the classroom, the focus is on teacher as "sender" of power and the student as "receiver." This view situates power "in" the teacher, and frames student communicative responses in the classroom as simply reactions to teacher power. Power is a much more complex phenomenon; according to Foucault (1980), power is exercised rather than possessed—it is a relational force that permeates society. Thus, I believe the behaviorist perspective is severely limited and leads to findings that misrepresent student communicative behaviors as resistance.

The strong and personal reactions reading these "power in the classroom" studies elicited inspired me to focus on this for my thesis; I believed that there was so much more to be said and understood about power and resistance. In addition, including students in the discussion about power would help to more clearly understand what affects student decisions to resist in the classroom. This is something lacking in the predominant instructional communication research which sees student responses and actions in the classroom are as simply a result of a teacher's use of various control strategies; however, my own experience as a student is evidence that this is not the case. A student brings a whole lifetime of experience with her/him into the classroom that informs the choices s/he makes. This is not to say that teachers do not affect student response—they absolutely do; however, there are factors other than teachers that contribute to student resistance in a classroom.

In my experience, teachers' personalities and how they exercised power in order to control my behavior definitely had a lot to do with my responses in the classroom. I can still vividly recall first grade: I had a very traditional teacher, Mrs. Walters, who had to be in her eighties at the time, and we did not get along from the start. I admit I was a bit on the impertinent side, always challenging, either with questions or pushing the limits of her tolerance. I remember that as punishment for some infraction, I actually had to write on the board "I will not talk in class" 100 times. The more Mrs. Walters tried to control me, the more I pushed back. While my responses were partially related to the personality clash, they were actually more a symptom of a tenuous home environment. My father was a "periodic" alcoholic, meaning that while he was able to maintain his job

and keep up the appearance of the successful white collar worker, with the nice house and family, he would go on the occasional binge, which left my mother a wreck and my sister and I confused. No one would ever know looking from the outside, but the emotional rollercoaster we rode those several years definitely contributed to my actions in the classroom, more than any strategy a teacher incorporated.

In fifth grade there was another intense personality clash: Mr. Peterson did not appreciate the questions I asked in class. Apparently I directly challenged something he said, which turned out to be inaccurate, and from then on he did not hide his dislike for me. As a result, I basically kept my mouth shut and became a passive learner, which was the way I continued through high school and into college, doing just enough to get by. I am fortunate that I am smart and it didn't take much to get decent grades. Although the potential was there, I never felt motivated to fully apply myself.

At Santa Clara University, although extensive doodling in my notebooks attests to the fact that I wasn't very interested in my classes, there were teachers who did motivate me to actively participate. One of the most memorable classes I took was an introduction to religious studies taught by Father Tennant Wright. It was a required course that I wasn't excited about, but it turned out to be one of the best classes I took in college. Father Wright engaged us in discussions about topics that were relevant to our lives. He was truly interested in what we, the students, had to say and contribute to the discussions. He didn't use any special technique, he just had a way of making us feel important to the conversations we were having. I didn't choose to participate because of some strategy he employed, in fact, I lost 1/3 of the possible points because I didn't regularly attend the

required 7:30 AM meditations. I would have received an "A" in the class had I made the decision to show up. The decision not to attend those meditations was based on my desire to sleep longer in the mornings and not a resistance strategy to an imposed assignment by the instructor; if they were at 9:30 AM, I would have gone. My final grade in the class was a "C"; however I learned more, and participated more, than in any class for which I had received an "A" to that point, and the passive student was re-awakened to the desire to actively learn. The point is that it wasn't the instructor's use of control strategies that encouraged participation; it was the fact that he cared about us and made the content relevant to our lives. He didn't use his position as teacher to control us; he created content and assignments that inspired us.

There is no question that a teacher has inherent power, and that the ways s/he chooses to engage that power will have an affect on students. My problem with the "power in the classroom" research is that it is one dimensional; power is much more complex than the studies lead us to believe. This limited view of power is paradigmatic; the majority of the extant research uses a positivistic approach and frames power in terms of compliance gaining techniques a teacher uses to manage the classroom. While it is inevitable that all teachers engage in classroom management of some kind, this is only one narrow way of framing power in the classroom. A more critical approach sees power as fluid, emergent, and nuanced and understands that power is a phenomenon that is part of daily life; behavior, language, social structures, and interpersonal relationships, including those between teacher and student, are several of the sites in which power manifests. A simplistic understanding of power casts it as a tool used to manipulate and

oppress. This perspective is the foundation of the "power in the classroom" series of communication research, which is aimed at providing teachers with strategies to control student behavior. A more complex view of power recognizes its fluidity and movement across and through individuals, social structures, and institutions. According to Foucault (1977), power is exercised through disciplinary strategies created to control: "...power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them" (p. 27). Following this understanding of power, Wood and Fassett (2003) based their research of identity, power, and technology on the idea that power is distributed, embodied, and malleable. Power is of interest to communication scholars because communication is a fundamental component of it; power cannot be expressed or even identified without communication. Thus, power has been greatly studied by communication scholars; one particular site of research is the academic classroom.

The student/teacher relationship is inherently power laden; the teacher, occupying the position of authority in the classroom, is perceived to have the power, while the student plays the obedient role in the relationship. Based on this understanding of a teacher as the "possessor" of power, a great deal of communication research about the phenomenon of power seeks to identify the most effective strategies for its use in order to best support student learning. Paradoxically, because a teacher does wield power in the classroom, even though it is ostensibly to serve student learning, student resistance cannot be avoided. According to Shor (1996), since teachers are "empowered

institutionally by the system but not constitutionally through negotiation with the students, the teacher cannot escape problems of resistance and control. In such a non-negotiable regime, students are intellectual and political exiles who grow more cleverly distant and resistant as they age" (p. 42). Extending Shor's reasoning, by the time a student reaches the college level, s/he has lived through twelve years of experiencing life as an "intellectual and political exile," and has built up an arsenal of resistance tactics upon which to draw. Thus, a significant portion of the literature into power in the classroom has focused on how to best deal with the "problem" of student resistance.

The fact that researchers see student resistance as a problem to be solved is an example of the limitations of both the definition of power and the paradigmatic focus of inquiry. This is to say that, because researchers view power through the prism of a positivistic paradigm, it has been limited to a tool teachers use to maintain control in the classroom. Thus, any attempts by a student to resist teacher control strategies are "problematic." An additional limitation is the fact that no outside influences are considered as factors in student resistance behavior. The classroom is not a location for interaction that exists in isolation from or impervious to the conditions of the society within which it is situated. Hence, students and teachers bring to it their lived experience and perceptions of the every day tensions of oppression and resistance that are enacted throughout society. In fact, the very institution of education serves to reify and re-inscribe existing hierarchical structures. Apple (1982) argues "the educational and cultural system is an exceptionally important element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in societies" (p. 10), bringing to light the fact

that the institution of education itself is embedded with power relations, not just those that exist between a teacher and student in the confines of the classroom. The relationships between tenured and non-tenured faculty and between administrators and faculty are just two examples of the types of hierarchical structures that exist at every level of an educational institution. For these reasons, the study of power relations within an educational setting is significant.

This thesis adds to the existing body of research about power and resistance by exploring power from the perspective of the student, which, based on my review of communication studies literature, is an area that has not been considered. Critical education scholar Paulo Freire promotes the inclusion of students in the process of their own education and believes that if they are not included, transformation is not possible. Freire (1970/2003) states, "Subjects must name the world in order to transform it" (p. 167). Until students are included in the conversations about power—beyond simply asking how they respond to and resist it—we will continue to reify the existing hierarchical power structures and disempower student learning. Therefore, it is my intention that this thesis, by including students in the exploration of power, illuminate the way lived experiences shape the dynamic of power relations and how we, as educators, can communicate in ways that serve to liberate rather than oppress.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have studied power using a variety of conceptualizations and points of view about its role in the classroom. Since the basis of this thesis is a critique of the conceptualization of power used in instructional communication research, I will first establish the framework for understanding power that informs this study. Next, this literature review will focus on the ways both instructional communication and critical education researchers study power. Beginning with instructional communication, I explore the definitions of power, its uses in the classroom, how students are represented in the literature, and offer a critique of the predominant research in the field. Next, I turn to critical pedagogy and focus on how power is used as a means of transforming education into a liberating process, the student's role in that process, and a critique of this philosophy. Following my exploration of critical pedagogy, I return to the communication studies field and discuss the ways more recent scholarship, in response to the limitations of the research on power in the classroom, incorporates a critical approach to its investigations of power and resistance in the classroom and how this shift in focus is, in part, what constitutes critical communication pedagogy.

It is the goal of this review to illustrate that, while important findings in the literature to date definitely enhance a teacher's ability to control classroom behavior, these findings are limited due to the research paradigm used in instructional communication, and there is a glaring omission in the literature: the voice of the student is absent. Nowhere do we hear from students, in their own words, how they understand power, how they experience it, or whether a teacher's use of power to control and

manage the classroom actually increases their learning. This information is critical if we seek to more completely understand the phenomenon of power and how it manifests in the classroom.

### *A Foucauldian Framework for Understanding Power*

Michel Foucault was concerned with the characteristics and effects of power, the ways in which power permeates society, and the resulting effects produced from intersections and interactions with race, class, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity. Foucault makes a distinction between a classical, juridical concept of power, what he called "concrete power," and an "economic functionality of power" (1980, p. 88); the former assumes power is a right that individuals possess like a commodity, and, as with any commodity, it can be exchanged, taken, or given away while the latter term sees power primarily as the "maintenance and reproduction of economic relations" (1980, p. 89). Foucault thought both views were incomplete as well as problematic; he did not believe that power was something that could be exchanged and given away like a commodity, or that all motivation for exercises of power could be found in the economy. Rather, Foucault understood power as something exercised, not possessed, a relational force that permeates all levels of society and exists in action.

According to Foucault (1983), power cannot be seen as separate from action; it is only in action that power exists. The exercise of power is:

> ...a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions, it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of action upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (p. 220)

In other words, according to Foucault, there is no possessor of power who uses that power over a specific individual; power is expressed through the actions within the relationship. The complexity of these relations of power create a web of actions and interactions throughout society, and it is within this web that power exists; there is not a specific "seat" of power per se from which one reigns over and controls "others." While there is a particular kind of power associated with positions of authority, this is not of interest to Foucault; he sees looking at power in this way—who has it and who doesn't—as reductive, that doing so misses the fact that power is dynamic, fluid, constantly reconfiguring itself and the relationships within which it is expressed. Power is a force that both flows and rushes through a society and creates myriad effects within the web of changing relationships and structures that make up that society. What *is* of interest to Foucault (1980) is discovering how existing power structures and relationships came to be, how they are maintained and perpetuated—i.e., how "mechanisms of power have been able to function" (p. 100).

Foucault (1977) believes that power structures and relationships are maintained via particular mechanisms and apparatuses within society, technologies of power that serve to modify, control, and inscribe identity upon others. Through his research into mental hospitals and the modern prison system, Foucault identified a kind of disciplinary power that served to control inmates. This disciplinary power was based, in part, on the mechanism of surveillance. This surveillance model was based on Jeremy Betham's panopticon, a structural layout of a prison in which all inmates could be observed at once by a central warden. This mechanism was recreated over and again throughout society

and thus, disciplinary power has been perpetuated in other institutions whose overt function isn't necessarily to discipline or punish. Institutions such as factories, hospitals, and even schools continue to effectively control individuals through the same apparatus as a prison. Foucault stresses that this disciplinary power is not the result of a conscious decision made by an individual; rather it emerged and is maintained through the institutions themselves. Thus, according to Foucault, it is important to investigate how the maintenance of such power structures and mechanisms occurs.

The maintenance of such mechanisms and structures of power is intrinsically bound within the relationship between power and knowledge. When power is exercised through subtle mechanisms, it cannot help but "evolve, organize and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs" (1980, p. 102). By "not ideological constructs," Foucault means that, rather than ideologies, the major mechanisms of power have produced "effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge" (p. 102). Thus, power is integral to the production of knowledge, and knowledge produces power; the two are reciprocal. Bodies of knowledge, according to Foucault, comprise discourse. Foucault was interested in the relationship between discourse and the effect of disciplinary control; according to Foucault, it is through discourse that the effects of power are distributed and perpetuated.

> In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. (1980, p. 93)

Discourse perpetuates power structures and relationships, and discourse is a function of power. There is power in discourse because it is equated with truth; "...truth and power

exist within each other, power masks itself by producing knowledge" (1982, p. 208). Discourse distributes the effects of power; according to Foucault, "we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1980, p. 93). The discourses Foucault was most interested in were those related to the human sciences. He believed that it is through such discourse that a "society of normalization" emerges (1980, p. 107). Discourse produces rules and norms that ultimately define codes of normalization. Thus, discourse serves to influence individual identity and the performance of those identities.

When looking at resistance through a Foucauldian lens, resistance is not something that can be directed towards an individual. If this were the case, even if such resistance succeeded on an individual level, systems of control and domination still persist in discourse; therefore, resistance should be directed towards uncovering and exposing the power structures and mechanisms that serve to perpetuate relationships based on oppression. As such, Foucault would not identify resistance as a negative reaction to power, which is how much of the literature in instructional communication sees it. For example, according to instructional communication, when a student questions the grade s/he received from a teacher, this is deemed a negative response to the teacher's power, as is a student not turning in assigned homework.

The primary definition of power used within instructional communication research is based on concrete power, which is antithetical to Foucault's approach to understanding the process of power. Seeing power as a tool a teacher has in her/his possession limits power's domain to an individual and the specific target of her/his

power, which is exactly what Foucault (1983) argued power is not: "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (p. 219). In addition, Foucault would argue that by seeking to create tidy categories and typologies of power strategies teachers use to influence student behavior and the subsequent methods of resistance used by students in response to those strategies, the discourse produced in instructional communication is serving to perpetuate and maintain existing power relationships within the classroom. This discourse is missing what Foucault termed "subjugated knowledges," which he described as "those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory" and "the set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (1980, p. 82). Thus, what is missing from instructional communication discourse on power in the classroom is the "naïve knowledge" of the student.

Even critical pedagogy is guilty of omitting low level knowledges. One limitation of the research in critical pedagogy is that it remains largely in the realm of theory and not in the practical, day to day experiences of students and teachers in the classroom (this is further discussed in the critique of critical pedagogy on page 31). Foucault (1980) believed that the actual experiences of life were more important than theory, reality matters more than knowledge. In addition, critical theorists are not impervious to the pull of "scientificity." Foucault warns against the tendency toward trying to develop a whole new set of universal truths to replace those that were the original focus of critical

research. Foucault advocated for a more local approach to criticism, one that would indicate "an autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regime of thought" (1980, p. 81). Foucault argued that research into power must include that knowledge that had been disqualified and deemed inadequate or insufficiently elaborated by human sciences. By focusing on student "knowledge" about power, I am hoping to do exactly that.

### *Instructional Communication Scholarship*

Instructional communication research uses a predominately behaviorist approach to the study of power and resistance in the classroom. Much of the extant research in the field situates power solely with the teacher and identifies ways in which this power can be best used to control student behavior. A second focus of this body of research is on the methods students use to resist perceived teacher power. This line of inquiry began with the 1983 publication of McCroskey and Richmond's "Power in the classroom I: Teacher and student perceptions," which focuses exclusively on the ways a teacher uses her/his power to keep students on task.

#### *Power: A Means to Control Behavior*

Early research into the phenomenon of power as it relates to instructional communication focused primarily on the impact of a teacher's power on student learning. Scholars focused on the ways a teacher could best use her/his power to influence student behavior in order to better manage the classroom environment, thereby enhancing student learning (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Kearney, Plax, Richmond & McCroskey,

1985; Richmond, 1990). McCroskey and Richmond's 1983 study laid the foundation for a program of research that resulted in seven articles, and planted the seeds for a future generation of researchers who continue to look at power from a behavioral perspective. Subsequent research expanded the focus from how a teacher could use power to control the classroom to the ways students respond to perceived teacher power. The primary goal of the series of studies was to test and refine the assumption that "a teacher cannot avoid using power in the classroom, that use of power is an inherent part of the teaching process...some bases of power will result in more positive learning than use of other bases" (p. 178).

McCroskey and Richmond's main purpose in "Power in the classroom I" was to determine the degree to which students and teachers have shared perceptions of the use of power in the classroom, as well as identify an acceptable methodology that would be used to measure power in the classroom throughout the series of studies. Determining the degree of shared perception was important, according to the authors, because once known, "both teachers and students can be taught what types of power produce certain outcomes (i.e., learning)" (p. 175). In this early body of research, power is defined as the ability of one person to persuade another to do something that they would not have done without being persuaded. This definition of power is further delineated into five types of power, adapted from French and Raven's bases for social power: 1. Coercive power—the potential threat of punishment motivates conformity; 2. Reward power—potential positive outcome leads to compliance; 3. Legitimate power—inherent authority of teacher based on role elicits compliance; 4. Referent power—student identification with

teacher and desire to please is primary motivation for conformity; and 5. Expert power—perception that teacher is the expert on the subject is the basis for student compliance.

The authors found that students and teachers did not have the same perceptions of power use in the classroom. While their study provides valuable information about how students perceive their teachers' use of power, and the degree to which this perception is consistent with the teachers' own perceptions of power usage, the operational definition of power itself—the ability to persuade—is problematic in that is suggests that students must be "persuaded" to learn, and that it is only through a teacher's exercise of power that this can happen. In other words, all student motivation is the result of the way a teacher uses her/his power. This definition does not account for external forces that may, in fact, have a greater influence on a student's desire to learn, nor does it account for any internal drive to excel in the class on the part of the individual student.

In a subsequent study, Kearney, Plax, Richmond, and McCroskey (1985) recognized the limitations of previous conceptualizations of power and sought to create a broader understanding of teacher influence. Using earlier work in the area of compliance gaining, this study focused on communication techniques and messages known as Behavior Alteration Techniques (BATs) and Behavior Alteration Messages (BAMs), and how teachers could best use these in the traditional classroom environment. An example of a BAT is the choice to appeal to a student's self esteem to elicit the desired response; the corresponding BAM would be something like, "You are such a good writer; I know once you make the suggested edits you will feel great!" The underlying assumption in the study is that teacher power differs from typical classroom management in that teacher

power is necessary to change deviant student behavior as opposed to strategies in classroom management, which are used to create optimal conditions for learning; "in the context of classroom management, power-based strategies contribute to the teacher's ability to maximize student on-task behaviors and to minimize student disruptions that interfere with the learning process" (p. 20).

The main goal of this study was to determine which behavior altering techniques and messages were effectively employed in the traditional classroom. Additionally, the authors sought to determine whether or not any other variables contributed to the effective implementation of BATs and BAMs, variables such as teacher gender, teaching experience, and job satisfaction. Teacher self reports indicated the use of seven categories of BATs: 1. Reward from behavior; 2. Reward from source; 3. Personal responsibility; 4. Expert power; 5. Self-esteem; 6. Altruism; and 7. Duty. Based on the results of the study, the authors suggest that "(1) Teachers perceive they employ primarily positive reward-type BATs" and "(2) Teachers report they frequently use the student's 'audience' to effect change...That is, the student is reminded of a responsibility to and interdependence with other class members. Thus by implication, the class pressures the student to alter her/his behavior" (p. 26). Findings also indicated that the teacher variables of gender, experience teaching, and job satisfaction did not significantly influence teacher use and effectiveness of behavior altering strategies, which the authors took to mean that gender, teaching experience, and job satisfaction have nothing to do with how a teacher uses her/his power to affect student learning. Once again, the narrow conceptualization of power as a tool to control behavior not only casts the student-teacher

relationship as one dimensional, it also suggests effective learning is solely a function of a teacher's ability to control classroom behavior.

In 1990, Richmond extended power in the classroom research to include whether the previously identified power bases and BATs had any influence on student motivation toward studying course content. This was an attempt to understand if incorporating these techniques had any impact on students when they were no longer under a teacher's "control." The findings of the study suggest that teacher affinity seeking behaviors are most strongly correlated to student exiting motivation. In other words, when a teacher established a positive relationship with a student, that student not only demonstrated motivation during the time of association with the teacher, but also tended to carry that motivation beyond the classroom. This study extends the findings of the earlier research by linking the effects of a teacher's use of power to student motivation beyond her/his in class contact with the teacher.

*The Student's Role in the Power Dynamic*

The majority of instructional communication research into power casts students as resistors of perceived teacher power. Studies have explored the strategies students use when they resist various power strategies teachers employ. There are, however, studies that explore students as possessors of power themselves.

*Student as resister of teacher power.* In most studies of power in the classroom, the student is framed as the resister of teacher power, which is a natural choice based on the focus of this research; when strategies of control are used, resistance is a natural, if unexpected, response. As a result, a substantial off-shoot of the original "power in the

classroom" series includes studies that explore student responses to perceived teacher power; specifically, this body of research explores how students resist perceived attempts of a teacher to use her/his power.

The initial research established that there are, in fact, specific behavior altering techniques and messages that a teacher could effectively use in order to better control the classroom environment. Understanding that students have particular ways of responding to these BATs and BAMs, researchers began to focus on those tactics students used to resist teacher compliance gaining strategies ("compliance-gaining" is another term used for a power strategy teachers use to control student behavior) (Kearney, Plax & Downs, 1986; Burroughs, Kearney & Plax, 1989; Kearney, Plax & Burroughs, 1991).

Just as previous research created categories of "power strategies" teachers used to control student behavior, studies into student resistance generated, and later validated, resistance tactics students incorporated in response to those strategies (Burroughs, Kearney & Plax, 1989; Kearney, Plax & Burroughs, 1991). Based on their coding of student-constructed messages resisting teacher compliance-gaining scenarios, Burroughs, Kearney & Plax created 19 categories that represented both active and passive forms of resistance behavior, including both communicative and behavioral forms of resistance. The authors found that across the categories, students identified both actual messages that they might say to their teacher, and behaviors they may use to demonstrate resistance, such as not coming prepared for class. The findings included compliance-resisting behaviors the authors termed "constructive" in addition to the "destructive" oppositional behavior that previous research had investigated. The "constructive oppositional

behaviors," according to the authors, offered feedback that a teacher could use to alter her/his behavior and instructional methods. Instances of constructive resistance include: "asking substantive or procedural questions; providing spontaneous assistance to other students; working on projects together without teacher sanction; correcting or clarifying lecture or textual material; and challenging the teacher's credentials or opinions" (1991, p. 216). While the authors suggest that "constructive" resistance tactics should be condoned or, in some cases, even encouraged, labeling these as "constructive oppositional behaviors" is problematic and perpetuates framing the teacher/student relationship as oppositional. A relationship built on opposition does not encourage engagement and open dialogue between teachers and students.

Further research validated the typology developed by Burroughs et al. and reduced the existing categories of resistance strategies into two dimensions of technique: teacher-owned (resistance strategies used when a student perceived the teacher as being at fault in some way) and student-owned (student assumed responsibility for the situation her/himself) (Kearney, Plax & Burroughs, 1991). Using attribution theory and problem ownership as their framework, the authors tested the degree to which the attribute "teacher immediacy" influenced student resistance decisions. Immediacy was defined as "physical or psychological closeness demonstrated primarily by nonverbal behaviors of approach, e.g., positive head nods, smiles, eye contact, vocal expressiveness, forward body leans, purposeful gestures, and close physical distance" (p. 327). One goal of the study was to test the relative impact of teacher immediacy and strategy on student selections of compliance-resistance strategies (previous research indicated that students

were more likely to comply with teachers they perceived as immediate and who used pro-social strategies, however research had not tested the relative impact of these factors). Results indicated that:

> Students who resist teachers' compliance-gaining attempts select strategies on the basis of who they perceive as responsible for their resistance. Our factor solution suggests that students blame two potential problem sources: either the teacher "owns" the problem, or the student does. Techniques and messages that comprise the teacher-owned dimension imply that the teacher, not the student, is the primary reason for their resistance. Students who reportedly use teacher-owned strategies are likely to perceive the teacher behaving inappropriately or inconsistently with their expectations of what instructors should or should not do...Our second factor, student-owned, suggests that students do not universally blame teachers for their resistance decisions. Instead, they frequently assume the responsibility for owning problems themselves. Techniques and messages representing the student-owned dimension reveal that students claim the right to make their own mistakes and to take control over their own lives. (p. 338)

According to the authors, these findings suggest that "teacher immediacy, not the compliance-gaining messages, direct students' resistance decisions" (p. 340). The authors questioned whether or not the findings could be generalized beyond the hypothetical teacher compliance-gaining scenarios. While this study looked to students to better understand the student-teacher power/resistance dynamic, the use of hypothetical scenarios forced students to respond to artificial situations. Further, their responses were confined to a scale of responses created to fit the findings of prior power in the classroom research. As such, the findings can only be suggestions of actual student resistance responses to real situations, which the authors seem to agree with by questioning the generalizability of the study beyond the students in their sample.

Subsequent studies into student resistance sought to identify additional factors affecting student resistance strategies. One additional factor was a multicultural

dimension (Lee, Levine & Cambra, 1997). The authors believed that "most compliance gaining research ignores the fact that the persuasion encounter is an interdependent process, in which both the source and the target are active participants in the interaction, and both may be pursuing competing agendas," (p. 30) and posited that student grade level, gender, and cultural orientation were variables that would influence a student's choice of compliance-resisting strategy. In other words, how the student resisted attempts by the teacher to use power to influence student behavior was affected by her/his cultural orientation. Lee et al. used "interdependence" and "independence" as variables to test whether culture influenced resistance strategy decisions. Additionally, the authors tested two situation variables for influence on student resistance strategy decisions: liked/disliked teacher and prosocial/antisocial strategies used by the teacher. Based on student self reports to a hypothetical teacher compliance-gaining scenario, the authors found:

> The persuasive advantage of teachers being liked by his or her students and of the use of pro-social strategies extends to younger children and to children with multicultural orientations. Liking of the teacher and teacher's strategy may be particularly important for those teaching more independent children as children scoring highly in interdependence may offer less resistance. (p. 42)

The authors further conclude that the research on student resistance and social influence in the classroom is applicable to culturally and ethnically diverse populations. This is problematic in that using a general scale to predict student resistance behavior doesn't take into account additional factors that may contribute to a student's motivation to resist in the classroom. While culture and ethnicity may indeed be factors in student resistance

decisions, as categories, they are too broad to account for the individual choices students make in the classroom.

*Students as sources of power.* A shift in the research occurred when students were seen as possessors of power, rather than simply resisters of perceived teacher power. Based on this understanding, researchers sought to identify factors that affected student use of power strategies. Studies focused on how students respond to Graduate Teaching Associates (GTAs) (Golish, 1999) as well as how students used power to gain compliance from their teachers, and how perceptions of teacher power and immediacy affect student use of power (Golish & Olsen, 2000). Golish (1999) focused her study on the perceptions students had of GTA power and credibility, and the strategies they employed to gain compliance from GTAs. Student responses to the question "what types of compliance-gaining strategies do you use with your GTA?" led to a typology consisting of nineteen different strategies students reported using with GTAs.

Golish & Olsen's 2000 study added student perceptions of teacher power and teacher non-verbal immediacy as factors that affect students' use of compliance gaining strategies with their teacher. The findings indicate that students did, in fact, employ various behavior altering techniques to gain compliance from their teachers, and that the degree of power students felt they actually had corresponded to the degree of power they perceived their teacher to have. Interestingly, the authors note that, although students did employ various compliance gaining techniques, student perception was that these techniques had little influence over their teacher.

*Critique*

Although this research offers teachers tools and strategies necessary to maintain a disciplined classroom (and thereby enhance student learning), as well as some awareness of the ways students resist teacher attempts to gain compliance, there are significant limitations. By focusing on attributes such as immediacy, cognitive affect, compliance gaining, and student resistance to teacher compliance strategies, the research has identified typologies and techniques that teachers use to control and manipulate the classroom environment and that students employ to resist those attempts, moving it away from the actual communication that takes place in instructional situations. Rather, as Sprague (1992) suggests, it has shifted to the study of behavioral characteristics, attributes, and attitudes due to "an allegiance to a model of social science that seeks to essentialize its findings in the form of covering laws" (p. 348).

This "allegiance" to a model that focuses on behavioral responses severely limits the research focused on teacher power and subsequent student resistance. Rather than explore the underlying tensions and factors that motivate resistance and control in the classroom, the majority of work has reduced the complex, nuanced dynamic to a behavior and response mechanism. This limited view does not take into consideration contemporary developments in the communication field, nor does it account for the complexities of meaning making that help to shape behavioral decisions. Rather, it portrays both the student and teacher as one dimensional, unable to think critically on their own and consciously decide how best to respond to stimuli. According to Foucault,

> What distinguishes thought is that it is something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behavior; it is also something quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this

> behavior...thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (1994, p. 117)

By forcing students to select pre-identified options in response to hypothetical classroom scenarios, communication researchers conflate thought with "the set of representations that underlie certain behaviors," and "the domain of attitudes that can determine this behavior." There is little room for critical thought in this method; the students have limited freedom in relation to what they do. The authors themselves questioned whether or not these responses to hypothetical situations would, in fact, appear in an actual classroom situation (Kearney et al., 1991). Power in the classroom research that prescribes teacher behavior altering techniques and strategies and creates typologies of student resistance decisions without consideration of what motivates perceptions and understandings of power negates thought. Further, the use of such a prescription may unwittingly serve to oppress both students and teachers by discouraging inquiry and critique.

### *Critical Pedagogy*

Critical education theorists and scholars focus on conditions within education that serve to perpetuate inequality and oppression. They argue that "teachers and students need to work toward the development of an educational process that provides the foundation for a truly democratic society" (Herideen, 1998, p. 27). Thus, critical pedagogy carries both a political and an educational perspective; indeed, there cannot be a separation of the two. According to Giroux (1992),

> Critical pedagogy as a form of cultural politics has meant a concern with analyses of the production and representation of meaning and how the

> practices they provoke are implicated in the dynamics of social power. This approach to critical pedagogy does not reduce educational practice to the issue of what works; instead, it stresses the importance of understanding what actually happens in classrooms and other educational settings by raising questions regarding what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction should one desire, and what it means to know something. (p. 240)

As a discipline that focuses on "the production and representation of meaning," critical pedagogy is particularly relevant to communication scholars. Unfortunately, most critical pedagogy researchers would not say the same of instructional communication scholarship; in fact, they would see much of the aforementioned instructional communication research into power in the classroom as examples of how education perpetuates oppression. Through a critical lens, the tools and strategies (BATs and BAMs) promoted are disciplinary tactics meant to control student behavior rather than attempts to motivate student learning. Further, they set students and teachers in problematic relation to one another. The underlying aim of these types of disciplinary tools is to keep students "on task," their bodies in the chairs taking in the information a teacher provides so that they can reproduce it at some future time. According to Foucault (1977), the result is "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (p. 138). Apple (1982) argues that the fact teachers employ such tactics is a sign that they themselves are oppressed by the educational system,

> the growth of behavior modification techniques and classroom management strategies and their incorporation within both curricular material and teachers' repertoires signifies these kinds of alterations [skilling and deskilling]. That is, as teachers lose control of the curricular and pedagogic skills to large publishing houses these skills are replaced by techniques for better controlling students. (p. 146)

Thus, teachers are also oppressed by the institution of education.

Critical pedagogy seeks to challenge the oppression within the institution of education and free both students and teachers from its grip. McLaren (1998) describes critical pedagogy as "a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state" (p. 7). Critical pedagogy takes into account the lived experience of the students in a classroom and asks how their understanding of the world has been shaped through their experiences with power relationships and structures, discrimination, oppression, and education. This history is integral to classroom dynamics, and often the classroom experience serves to reify existing hierarchies and oppressive structures students have experienced throughout their lives. Breaking this cycle of oppression within the classroom is a goal of critical educators. According to Herideen (1998), "critical educational theory is a school of thought that grapples with how to create a more liberating and exhilarating pedagogy. It challenges traditional classroom practices that serve to threaten and disempower students" (p. 67).

*Power: A Means to Stimulate Critical Thought*

Freire (1970/2003) states, "to alienate human beings from their own decision making is to change them into objects" (p. 85). What Freire is getting at here is that as long as students are not engaged in the discussion and decision making around their own education, as long as any attempt to question a teacher is labeled as "resistance," then they are, in essence, being treated as objects rather than human beings with knowledge and understanding based on their lived experience. Critical pedagogy is a direct

challenge to the traditional educational system in which students are objects acted upon by the structure and ideology of the institution and society of which they are a part. In his forward to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Richard Shaull (2003) states,

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

Critical educators use their power in the classroom to help stimulate critical thought in their students and themselves, which is essential to the success of a liberatory pedagogy. Giroux (1983) claims that "critical theory contains a transcendent element in which critical thought becomes the precondition for human freedom" (p. 19). bell hooks (1994) states that "without the capacity to think critically about ourselves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow" (p. 202). Through nurturing critical thought in themselves and their students, critical educators seek to inspire students to become active participants in society and advocates for democracy so that freedom can be experienced by all. According to Shor (1987), "critical education prepares students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture" (p. 48). Central to this end is the "need to create a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power over their lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge production and acquisition" (Giroux, 1992, p. 224). In order to bring about this "sphere," critical educators explore and question the myriad ways oppression occurs in society through its politics, culture, and power structures. Ideally, these questions will test, and ultimately change, the oppressive power structures within education and society

that serve to perpetuate inequality based on class, race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, education, and ability.

Critical educational theorists argue that both students and teachers have the power to create change. Herideen (1998) states, "students and teachers are not merely passive recipients of an imposed dominant ideology, but rather active subjects who resist, struggle, and create challenges to the most oppressive aspects of school," as such, they need to "work together toward the development of an educational process that provides the foundation for a truly democratic society" (p. 27). This can only be done when teachers see students as integrally connected to the society of which they are a part, and recognize that external factors related to this connection influence in-class dynamics and learning. When seen in this light, the classroom is a site of struggle and possibility, a place in which hooks (1994) sees the "opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom" (p. 207). "Education as the practice of freedom" can only happen when students are stimulated and motivated to think critically about their lives and the world in which they live.

Critical pedagogues recognize that power is inherent in pedagogy, which can be problematic. According to Giroux (1992), "pedagogy is always related to power" (p. 15); however, what is important is that this power is used in ways that serve to liberate rather than oppress students. For Bizell (1991), it is a teacher's moral obligation to ensure students' best interests are served whenever any power or authority is exercised in the

classroom. Instead of trying to control students and keep them on task, educators should ask whether or not the task itself serves the student. In order to best serve students, teachers must give up using power in a coercive, manipulative manner and instead focus on the positive ways authority can be used to facilitate dialogue and engagement; this is what Giroux (1988) calls liberatory authority. A teacher does not relinquish all power in the classroom—something that is not even possible according to Foucault. Rather, s/he uses her/his authority to "provide the pedagogical conditions that empower students not only to speak but also to develop the critical capacities and courage to transform the conditions that oppress them and others in the first place" (Giroux, 1992, p. 158). Thus, a teacher's goal should be to inspire students to think critically by engaging them through an awareness of the world and their place in it. One way critical educators attempt to do this is through sharing power and authority in the classroom. Shor (1996) argues that this benefits students because "by sharing authority and assuming teacherly roles, students take greater responsibility for their educations, which can translate into a more intense relationship between them and the learning process" (p. 199). When students take responsibility for the learning process, they enter a new relationship with their teachers.

*The Student's Role in the Power Dynamic*

Critical theory seeks to create a democratic classroom space, one that embodies the ideals of an emancipatory society in which freedom exists for all. In order to reflect these ideals, the traditional power relationship between teacher and student must be transformed. According to Howard (2004), "educators must create an educational culture that empowers students by leveling the teacher-student hierarchy and that reflects a re-

imagining of the academy's hegemonic communication patterns, institutional structures and disciplinary turf guarding" (p. 217). In other words, educators need to encourage and allow students to participate in the structuring and process of their own education, which is not possible in the traditional hierarchical relationship. Freire (1970/2003) sees this traditional teacher-student relationship as one in which there is a "narrating Subject" and "patient, listening objects." In this traditional model, the teacher's task is to "fill students with the content of his narration–contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (p. 71). In this relationship, the teacher is the expert espousing knowledge to passive students who, on their own, have nothing to contribute. In order to break down this relationship, students must be seen as active participants in the classroom and not simply passive listeners. Teachers must acknowledge that students' life histories are rife with experiences and understandings that inform the learning process, and therefore it is the responsibility of the teacher to create an environment in which students have the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard. The only way to do this, according to Freire (1970/2003), is through a dialogic model,

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 80)

The relationship between teacher and student is reciprocal; the teacher also learns from the students and is transformed through the very act of teaching.

*Critique*

Critical pedagogy presents an ideal vision of how education can function to create a society in which freedom exists for all. This idealized vision is actually one of its limitations and begs the question, is "freedom" something that is attainable by everyone in our society, or even in an educational setting? In the educational context, regardless of how inspired and motivated a teacher may be to incorporate critical pedagogical practices into her/his teaching, the fact remains that there is an institutional structure that, by its very nature, serves to perpetuate the unequal status quo. Teachers must meet certain requirements in order to ensure their ongoing employment, thus they are not truly "free" to fully embrace critical pedagogical practices, nor are students readily open to accept these practices. Since the inculcation of the current educational model of passive student begins in kindergarten, by the time students reach college these patterns are often so ingrained that it is difficult to break them out of their passive habits. Shor (1996) notes the difficulty a teacher has in getting students to accept critical practices in the classroom, "in terms of transforming undemocratic power relations, I cannot instantly shed or deny the authority I bring to class. Many students won't allow that. They expect me to install unilateral authority; in some ways, they prefer it or want it, more than just expect it" (p. 18).

An additional limitation is the fact that the majority of critical pedagogical scholarship focuses on theory rather than practical application. In her critique of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth (1989) argues that the majority of articles appearing in academic journals fail to locate theoretical constructs within the actual practices explored. The research is devoid of discussions of historical context and political position leaving the

definitions of critical pedagogy highly abstract and not grounded in actual practice. While the literature claims to be political and promotes the breaking down of power relationships, Ellsworth asserts "there have been no sustained research attempts to explore whether or how the practices it prescribes actually alter specific power relations outside or inside schools" (p. 301). Although student empowerment is a central theme in critical pedagogy, in actuality, power imbalances are left intact and empowerment remains an abstract concept, "student empowerment has been defined in the broadest possible humanist terms, and becomes a 'capacity to act effectively' in a way that fails to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 307). Critical educators do not adequately address the fact that paternalism continues to exist in practice. Additionally, Ellsworth argues that dialogue, which is central to the creation of a liberatory classroom, is impossible in our culture overall due to unjust power relations based on race, class, and gender. Ellsworth maintains that these injustices distort communication and "cannot be overcome in a classroom, no matter how committed the teacher and students are to 'overcoming conditions that perpetuate suffering'" (p. 316).

### *Critical Communication Pedagogy Research*

Fueled by a desire to more deeply understand how unjust power relations affect communication and the role power and resistance play in the classroom, beyond a social scientific model, communication scholars have incorporated theoretical aspects of critical pedagogy into research and classroom practice. This has led to the emergence of scholarship that eschews behavioral-based methods favored by the majority of

instructional communication research, and chooses instead to employ a critical perspective. Studies focused on the manifestations of power through factors such as race, gender, identity negotiation, and discourse have contributed significant advances in the literature by offering alternate perspectives to how power manifests in educational settings, as well as providing examples of actual classroom situations. The findings, while not broadly generalizable, provide deep insight into the ways that race (Cooks, 2003; 1994; Hendrix, et al., 2003; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003), gender (Cooks & Sun, 2002; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003), identity negotiation (Hendrix et al., 2003; Wood & Fassett, 2004), sexuality (Alexander, 2004; Heinz, 2002; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Warren & Fassett, 2004), and educational discourse (Fassett & Warren, 2004) illuminate student resistance, as well as reify existing structures of control and domination. This body of research takes into account current theory and research in the communication field as a whole, as well as critical educational theory and is a departure from the narrower view of power that characterizes instructional communication's power in the classroom research.

*Broadening the Conceptualization of Power*

Most of the critical work in communication education and instructional communication research into power in the classroom is a direct response to Sprague's call to shift the focus away from a behavioral based methodology. Sprague (1992) argues that instructional communication's conceptualization of power is too narrow and appeals to scholars in the field to incorporate a critical approach to their studies. She highlights the fact that the research to date in the instructional communication area relies primarily on the process/product paradigm, to the exclusion of more sophisticated approaches and

understandings that currently provide the frame for research throughout the communication and education fields. Sprague (1992) contends, "The focus in instructional communication has been narrowed to the point that researchers have failed to ask a number of important questions about how communication works in conjunction with the social and political forces that constrain it and define it" (p. 5). Sprague's list of questions includes "how does power function in the classroom?" Sprague argues that the current research into this question offers an overly simplistic description of the complex phenomenon of power and calls for an expanded approach that takes into account the way such factors as society, culture, and individual history contribute to student response in a classroom.

In addition to pointing out how the majority of research in this area is inadequate and has not kept up with theoretical advances in the field overall, Sprague (1993) seeks to refocus communication education research towards discipline-specific pedagogical theories and away from the study of generic models and general educational concepts, and to bring communication theory more fully into communication pedagogical scholarship and practices. She argues that not only is the continued focus on inclusive and generalizable studies inadequate, there is also a widening gap between this research and the theoretical advances in the communication field as a whole. This gap results in inconsistencies across the curriculum, particularly in introductory courses. More importantly, according to Sprague (1993), pedagogical research needs to become important to all communication scholars in order to "ensure probing discussions about how we use power in the lives of our students" (p. 10).

Sprague's critique of instructional communication's focus on power served to inspire new research into power in the classroom based on a much broader conceptualization of power, one that understands power to be a multi-faceted, complex, and nuanced phenomenon. In addition to an expanded view of power, this new generation of researchers incorporates alternate methodological approaches in their studies. The ensuing literature reports on some of these explorations of power that attempt to address the limitations in the literature by using a critical perspective, as Sprague suggests. These studies include the examination of factors such as identity and culture, and how these influence not only power and resistance in the classroom, but how they serve to perpetuate inequality and oppression inside the classroom and in society as a whole.

*Identity as a component of power relations.* From a critical perspective, identity formation is a complex process based on factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Further, identities are not static; rather they are shaped and reshaped through interaction and collision with individuals, institutions, and social structures, thus, identity negotiation is inherently intertwined with the dynamics of power. Recent scholarship in the communication education area grapples with questions of identity and power (Cooks, 2003; Cooks & Sun, 2002; Heinz, 2002; Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren, 2003; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003).

Recognizing the relationship between politics of identity negotiation and power, Cooks focused her 2003 study on the idea of position and positionalities to look at the ways identities are interactionally and contextually negotiated. She used race as the main

component of identity, and addressed the inherent power of whiteness, which includes the power to define what is normal and comfortable and who counts in a culture. Cooks' purpose was to begin to construct a pedagogy that makes the constraints of whiteness visible. Making race visible is also a goal of Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren (2003). In response to a perceived absence of significant studies and research in *Communication Education* that explore the influence race has in academic settings, as well how identities are negotiated in the classroom, the authors call for the use of a critical progressive pedagogy that focuses on curriculum, agency, and identity negotiation.

Gender is another aspect of identity that is notably absent from the majority of research exploring power in the classroom. In more current research, scholars are addressing this omission and studying the influence gender has on the student-teacher relationship and power-resistance dynamics in the classroom. Cooks and Sun (2002) explore the construction and inherent power in gender identities that occur in a communication course entitled "Gender, Culture and Communication." In this course, Cooks and Sun went beyond simply teaching that gender is socially constructed; they asked students to critique and question the very need for gender as a basis of identity construction. Including such an inquiry in the course structure, and actively eliciting students' critical thoughts about gender as a basis for identity, is a practical example of how to incorporate critical theory into the classroom. Cooks and Sun analyzed the incidents of resistance expressed in class discussion as well as in students' written reflections of the course and found that resistance manifested in multiple ways, including student resistance to the very idea of deconstructing gender as a category. Through post-

course focus groups, the authors provided an opportunity for students to grapple with uncomfortable moral discourse and create meaning through their interactions with one another. Johnson and Bhatt (2003) also provided an opportunity for their students to struggle with uncomfortable discourse by creating a "resistive space" in the classroom. Specifically, through autoethnography, the authors use their own identities as a starting point for understanding how alliances are inherently resistive in that they actively critique existing power structures present in race and sexuality, and call out the fact that individual identity, or sense of self, is inscribed with privilege and power. In using their own "embodied" practices as the source for analysis, Johnson and Bhatt challenge their students to re-think their beliefs about gender, sexuality, race, and power.

Wood & Fassett (2004) also use an autoethnographic approach in their exploration of identity, power, and technology in the classroom. Grounding their study in the works of Foucault and de Certeau, Wood and Fassett explore the ways power functions in the communication classroom through engagement and analysis of a series of autoethnographic teaching moments. These moments center on communication that is computer mediated. The authors argue that the technologies employed in the classroom and teaching methods shape how teachers and students understand themselves and each other. Through their personal experiences with computer mediated communication, Wood & Fassett explore shifting expressions of power, both their own power and that of the students in their classes. The authors believe that power is much more complex than the extant instructional communication research supposes; specifically they advocate that power is distributed, embodied, and malleable.

Fassett & Warren (2004) researched how inherent power structures in education contribute to shaping identity; specifically, they explored how "educational systems systemically reproduce privilege and oppression through the everyday communicative choices and behaviors of individuals" (p. 22). The authors analyzed everyday talk elicited from focus groups comprised of both students and teachers in an attempt to uncover how power is maintained and where it is situated. The data from these interviews elicited three strategic rhetorics: the strategy of individualism, the strategy of victimization, and the strategy of authenticity. As a result of their findings, Fassett & Warren advocate reflexivity; they ask that we carefully examine the ways educational identities are created and maintained through discourse. They also suggest a change in the way we talk about education. Finally, they call for the continued bridging of critical pedagogy with communication studies scholarship, a call that echoes back to 1992 when Sprague made her initial call for a critical approach in instructional communication research.

### *Conclusion*

In her 1992 article, "Expanding the research agenda for instructional communication: Raising some unasked questions," Sprague made a call for researchers in instructional communication to take a critical approach in their scholarship. One of the suggestions she made in that article was to ask some specific questions, including "how does power function in the classroom?" Several scholars have answered that call; the majority of the published work, however, is still entrenched in the positivistic/discovery paradigm. I see this thesis as a contribution to the emerging critical communication

scholarship that is answering Sprague's call. Also, by focusing on power from the point of view of the student, my research introduces student voice to the conversation on power, a voice currently missing from the literature. Thus, my research questions seek to discover how students understand power, how they experience it in the classroom, and how their experiences of power outside the classroom inform their in-class communicative choices.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

In my review of the different approaches to the study of power in the classroom, I found that student voice is missing from the literature; researchers have not taken students' own life experiences and their individual understanding of power and resistance into account. The previous review of the literature in Chapter 2 reflects a pool of research that, for the most part, uses a predominantly behaviorist perspective in its study of power, and defines power as a tool teachers use to control student behavior. This approach casts students as the target of teacher power, and any attempts to include student perspective in the studies serve to reinforce this role; either a student complies with or resists teacher attempts to use power in the classroom. Researchers have not addressed how students actually understand and experience power or the ways that power dynamics outside the classroom affect communication in the classroom. The focus of most of the extant research is strictly on how teachers can effectively manage student behavior in the classroom, and thereby enhance student learning. Thus, the majority of the research suggests that neither students nor teachers are shaped or affected in any way by power structures and relations outside the classroom walls. While classroom management skills are an important component of a teacher's repertoire, this narrow focus limits our ability to fully recognize how power affects the classroom environment, and whether or not it can enhance or hinder student learning.

A new generation of communication scholars has eschewed the narrow view of power held by predominant research in favor of a more critical approach to its study. While these recent endeavors have greatly broadened the ways power and its effects are

studied, still more research is needed on the ways that students themselves actually understand and experience power, and how their experiences of power outside the classroom inform their in-class communicative choices. Researchers must take into account that each student who enters a classroom has a complex history of experiences and understandings of power, as do teachers, and these histories greatly impact the in-class dynamics and relationships associated with power. In order to learn how lived histories of students affect power in the classroom, in this study I have explored students' understandings and experiences of power, both inside and outside the classroom. Also, as a student and teacher myself, my own experiences of power and resistance inform this study. The following research questions served to guide my exploration:

> RQ1: How do students define & understand power?
>
> RQ2: How have students experienced power and resistance in educational settings?
>
> RQ3: What experiences with power outside the classroom inform student participation and resistance in the classroom?

The next set of questions focused on how graduate teaching associates (GTAs) understand and experience power and resistance and how these inform their teaching:

> RQ4: How do GTAs define & understand power?
>
> RQ5: How have GTAs experienced power and resistance in educational settings?
>
> RQ6: What experiences with power outside the classroom inform GTAs' pedagogical practices and responses to student resistance in the classroom?

I included GTAs in my research since they shift between their roles as student and teacher. I was interested in how this shifting back and forth between roles altered their

perception of power in the classroom, and whether their own experiences with power and resistance as students inform their pedagogical choices as teachers.

## *Methods*

In order to effectively answer my research questions, I chose to use focus group analysis—a method intentionally counter to the positivistic or discovery paradigm within which the majority of communication research about power in the classroom falls. As discussed in the previous chapter, within instructional communication there are differing views on which methods produce results most useful to the communication field. Sprague (2002) questions the value of instructional communication research intended to fit its findings into tidy categories that could be broadly generalized into covering laws, and Pelias (2000) vents his frustration at the dependence on the scientific model in communication research in his autoethnographic essay:

> you read the abstracts and shake your head, not because you are confused by the content, but because you cannot understand how the scientific model continues to thrive in the discipline given the number of arguments that show why the heart needs to accompany the head, particularly with such topics as communication apprehension, intimacy, compliance gaining strategies, communication competence, gender, relational maintenance, and empathy. (p. 223)

While there are certainly many uses for a scientific model in communication research, power is too complex a phenomenon to be understood through its lens alone.

### *Paradigms (discovery vs. critical)*

*Discovery paradigm.* The extant instructional communication research into power in the classroom relies heavily on the discovery (or positivistic) paradigm. A perspective based on the discovery paradigm assumes there is a logical, observable reality that can be known by any knower; that this reality is known through detached and

decontextualized methods; these methods can be duplicated and generalized due to the precision of procedures; and that reality can be accurately represented through classification (Merrigan & Huston, 2004). Additionally, Baxter and Babbie (2004) state that research using the discovery paradigm "seeks to predict and explain variables in a way that maximizes generalization to the largest possible class of phenomena" (p. 55). This desire to generalize findings leads to research that, by necessity, must fit variables into particular categories and groups, and thus, the use of the discovery paradigm in the study of power in the classroom must limit power to a measurable and observable behavior and cannot delve deeply enough into the phenomenon to uncover anything more than simple behavior and response processes. The desire to generalize findings of power in the classroom research brings up two questions: 1) Can researchers actual generalize their findings beyond the sample populations used—most studies were done in predominately white, middle class universities, which may not translate to more culturally and economically diverse environments? 2) Is it even possible, or for that matter, desirable, to generalize findings about power in the classroom?

*Critical paradigm.* Research that employs a critical perspective does not seek to generalize findings; indeed, it does not assume that there is, in fact, an objective knowable reality. This assumption is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed and, as such, there are multiple ways of perceiving and knowing; each individual understands reality based on her/his own social, political, economic, gendered, ethnic, and educational experiences. This includes the researcher, and so critical scholars recognize that their research is "subjective" and contextual; there is no possibility of an

"objective" study since the researcher brings to it her/his own unique ways of understanding and knowing. In critical research, this subjectivity is not a problem; according to Merrigan & Huston (2004), "since the researcher cannot escape the subjective and interpretive view of reality, then this standpoint should be made explicit and clear" (p. 13). Further, "In ideological arguments, the researcher's subjective evaluation and criticism...is desirable and valuable" (p. 74).

Rather than seeking to create broadly generalizable theory, the goal of critical research is to ignite change. It attempts to do this by elucidating the experiences and struggles of those who are unheard and underrepresented in our society. In the case of power in the classroom research, students are the unheard and underrepresented. Critical research into power in the classroom sees the student as an integral part of the research and seeks to identify ways that existing power structures and relationships serve to perpetuate inequality. This goal leads to hope, for there can be no change until the sources of inequality are identified.

*Paradigmatic focus of this research.* This thesis contributes to the body of critical research about power and resistance by focusing on power as a multi-faceted, complex phenomenon. I explored how undergraduate students and GTAs understand and experience power, and how those understandings and experiences with power and resistance influence their choices in the classroom. I also observed the ways power and resistance were enacted in my own classroom; I incorporated critical communication pedagogy, as elucidated by Fassett & Warren (2007), into my teaching of Public Speaking (Comm20) and Argumentation (Comm40). Critical communication pedagogy

incorporates theories and ideologies from instructional communication researchers, critical education scholars, critical philosophers, and performative researchers. Paulo Freire is considered to be one of the most significant founders of critical pedagogy. In his germinal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1970/2003) rejects the traditional approach to education, what he calls a "banking" system, and advocates for taking a more holistic approach that sees students as Subjects rather than objects in the process of learning. This requires recognizing that each student seated before us brings with her/him a web of history, experiences, and beliefs that shape class participation, communication, and learning. In other words, no student is simply a mind to be filled with knowledge. A performative pedagogy also embraces this understanding of the student and seeks to incorporate the very tensions of life into the learning environment. According to Conquergood (1993), a performance theory of pedagogy "privileges challenge, struggle, innovation, movement, and openness. Knowledge and ideas are dynamic and co-experienced instead of static and transmitted" (p. 339). In both my research and teaching, I attempted to make every effort to "invite students into active conversations with and about the materials under study" (Conquergood, 1993, p. 339).

*Focus Group Interviews*

In order to gain an understanding of the complex, nuanced ways that power expresses itself in a classroom setting, it is important to discover how students themselves understand and experience it. Focus groups make it possible to have a direct discussion on the topic, and, according to Morgan & Krueger (1993), "focus group interviews, when conducted in a non-threatening and permissive environment, are especially useful when

working with categories of people who have historically had limited power and influence" (p. 15). Students and GTAs fall into such categories of people. In addition to a "safe" environment, research participants may feel freer to express their views and opinions since they are among a group that is similar in some way; in the case of the focus groups I conducted, that similarity is that all participants were either undergraduate students or GTAs.

Focus groups also provide the opportunity for more complex discussion to emerge as participant responses can trigger deep thought and reflection on the part of other participants. The focus group is, according to Madriz (2003), "a collectivistic rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs" (p. 364). Focus groups provide a forum to gather large amounts of data in the form of collective testimonies and group resistance narratives in a relatively short period of time (Madriz, 2003). In addition, the dialogic method is consistent with a critical approach and, according to Padilla (1993) it is an overtly political method "in the sense that its aim is to help the subjects achieve a higher level of awareness about the sociopolitical structures and cultural practices that have shaped their lives" (p. 154).

Focus groups are characterized by the interaction that occurs between participants in response to a prompt from the researcher. This interaction allows for differing points of view to emerge, which is important in order not to oversimplify participant responses. Morgan & Krueger (1993) assert "It can be dangerous to oversimplify human motivation. By comparing the different points of view that participants exchange during the

interactions in focus groups, researchers can examine motivation with a degree of complexity that is typically not available with other methods" (p. 16). Thus, in my research, I facilitated dialogic focus groups with undergraduate students, with GTAs, and with a group of both undergraduate students and GTAs in order to better understand how they experience power and resistance in educational settings, and how they are motivated by these phenomena.

There are several limitations associated with conducting focus groups. These include the fact that the very presence of a facilitator may impact participant responses; Madriz (2003) argues, "given the necessary presence of a facilitator, it is difficult to discern how 'authentic' the social interaction in a focus group really is" (p. 365). Also, due to the small number of participants in a focus group as well as the use of nonrandom sampling, the "sample obtained is often less representative and poses greater threats to external validity" (Merrigan & Logan-Huston, 2004, p. 92). This means that the results from focus group interviews cannot be generalized to larger communities; however, since generalizability was not a goal of my research, focus groups provided the means to gather data that helped to answer my research questions.

*Participants.* I conducted six focus groups, which, according to Morgan (1993), is an appropriate number for a stand alone study. Of the six focus groups, four consisted of all undergraduate students, one group was all GTAs, and the sixth was a combination of both. A total of 23 undergraduate students and 8 GTAs participated in the focus groups. The undergraduate participants consisted of 11 females, and 10 males, 17 freshmen, 2 sophomores, 2 juniors, and 2 seniors. Reported ethnicities were: 8

Caucasian, 5 Asian, 5 African American, 2 Hispanic, and 3 reported mixed ethnicities. Six female and 3 male GTAs participated in the focus groups. The GTA ethnicities were: 4 Caucasian, 3 Asian, and 1 African American. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes.

I used a convenience sample for my research; I invited undergraduate volunteers from the two classes I taught fall 2006—Public Speaking (Comm20) and Argumentation & Advocacy (Comm40)—and I invited participation from my colleagues in the GTA program. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. I received IRB clearance to conduct these focus groups (appendix A), and prior to beginning the group, I reviewed informed consent with each participant and they chose a pseudonym for the study (see appendix B for a copy of informed consent).

*Facilitator/moderator.* Central to a successful focus group is the moderator/facilitator. The moderator can make the difference between a dynamic focus group in which participants feel free to openly discuss the topics of the group and one in which participants feel intimidated or even threatened and therefore do not participate as freely. Also, an inexperienced moderator can allow a few members of the group to dominate the conversation (Krueger, 1993). Thus, it is important that the moderator be experienced and capable of creating a "comfortable, permissive environment" for the focus group (Krueger, 1993, p. 74), as well as adept at eliciting participation from all group members. As someone who has had several years of experience in group facilitation, I was confident I could create an environment conducive to participation, as

well as inspire participation from group members; thus, I moderated each focus group myself.

*Focus group interview protocol.* Based on my research questions, I developed an interview guide that included eleven questions for all focus groups, and up to three additional questions for each specific group (undergraduate student, GTA, or mixed). I designed these questions to elicit responses that I then used to more fully understand participants' experiences with power and resistance in the classroom (see Appendix C).

*Data analysis.* Each focus group interview was audio taped. I transcribed these interviews myself using participants' pseudonyms and general demographic data. I did not modify the transcripts in anyway; rather I left the language and talk that occurred during the focus groups intact. I analyzed and coded the raw data and then reported the findings from my analysis in what Krueger (1994) identifies as a descriptive summary format. In this format, the researcher states the interview question and then reports subsequent participant responses. The following chapter includes both the findings and my analysis.

# Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

I approached the focus groups with great enthusiasm; I was excited to hear what students and GTAs had to say about power, how they both understood and experienced it in their lives. I was certain that their understanding of the concept would support my argument that there is more to power in the classroom than simply control strategies implemented by teachers, and the resulting student resistance to those strategies. Also, since instructional communication research into power in the classroom does not include the student perspective, I saw these focus groups as the vehicle to rectify this omission in the research. I was not disappointed; the focus groups proved to be fertile ground for participants to discuss and share their experiences of power. I was moved and inspired by the openness with which many of them shared their personal stories; I was inspired by the struggles, obstacles, and seemingly intolerable situations many of the focus group members confront throughout their educational experience; and I was impressed by the depth of thought demonstrated in some of their responses. This isn't to say that everything participants shared was inspiring; I also found myself rather irritated by some of the conversations, particularly when participants expressed an understanding of power consistent with the narrow definition used in much of the instructional communication research. In the following pages, I share some of what was said in the focus groups along with an analysis of the emergent themes.

This chapter includes the findings from six focus group interviews conducted between November 27, 2006 and December 6, 2006. I have categorized the findings by common themes across all focus groups. These themes correlate to the research

questions posed in the study: RQ1: How do students define & understand power? RQ2: How have students experienced power and resistance in educational settings? RQ3: What experiences with power outside the classroom inform student participation and resistance in the classroom? RQ4: How do GTAs define & understand power? RQ5: How have GTAs experienced power and resistance in educational settings? RQ6: What experiences with power outside the classroom inform GTAs' pedagogical practices and responses to student resistance in the classroom? I have combined student and GTA responses in each category, with the exception of those responses regarding how GTAs understand and experience power as teachers.

The interviews and transcripts provided a wealth of rich descriptions, personal stories and narratives, far more information than is feasible to include in the current study. Thus, I have had to limit the inclusion of narratives and descriptions to those that most directly address the purpose of the study: to include the student perspective on how power and resistance manifest in the classroom. This leaves me with a great reservoir of personal stories and data that will undoubtedly provide the seeds of future research. In what follows, I have attempted to capture, as truthfully as possible, the content as well as the spirit of each individual and group. It is my hope that the descriptions in this chapter allow the student voices to be heard as they intended without filter or rewording.

### *Similarities and Differences Between GTAs and Undergraduates*

As I read over the transcripts, it was interesting that there were not many differences between the responses of GTAs and undergraduates. Both groups had similar ways of understanding and experiencing power and resistance. GTA stories of power and

resistance in a school setting mirrored those of the undergraduates. A difference in these stories was that the examples from GTAs reflected that they actively resisted in school whereas the undergraduates' examples tended to suggest more passive types of resistance. I think the responses were more similar than I expected because most of the GTAs are relatively young and began graduate school immediately following completion of an undergraduate degree, and, as GTAs, they are still students. The older GTAs, especially those who have had experience working prior to starting their graduate studies, tended to have slightly different understandings than their younger counterparts that incorporated experiences from their previous jobs.

The main difference between GTA and undergraduate responses is that, while both groups shared their experiences of power and resistance as a student, the GTAs also explained how their understanding and experiences affect the pedagogical choices they make as teachers, and the resulting responses from their own students. Overall, the way GTAs and undergraduates understand power and resistance is very similar; thus, all the responses are included together in the following analysis of the findings, except those involving GTAs' experiences as teachers.

### *Understandings of Power and Resistance*

Each focus group was made up of individuals with divergent backgrounds and life experiences. These backgrounds and experiences clearly contribute to and influence how participants understand power and resistance. Influences that appeared to affect the differing perceptions of power include participants' relationships with parents, where the participant grew up, whether s/he attended an urban or suburban school, a public or

private school, and how s/he perceives authority. Although there is great diversity among the participants, there are commonalities as well as differences in their responses. The following are the main themes that emerged out of my review of the transcripts.

*Power Defined*

Almost immediately, it was clear that the students' initial definition of power was consistent with the type of power Foucault referred to as "concrete power," which is power that "one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate..." (1980, p. 88). This idea of power as a possession is consistent with the way that the majority of instructional communication research defines power in the classroom: the possessor of power is the teacher, and the object of that power is the student. It is within that relationship that power is expressed. The teacher/student relationship is one example participants used to illustrate their understanding that power exists between people in relationship. One GTA noted that, "When I hear power, I don't picture a light bulb or energy source, you know what I mean, like powering your car or your alternator...I think when we hear the word 'power'...we think of it in this way of like human interaction" (Pat, GTA, mixed group, 12/06/06). Each definition had to do with the tensions that exist between individuals when one individual or group is perceived to have some authority or control over another individual or group, thus, power is about control. Additional characteristics of power, according to participants, are: it is hierarchical; it is seen to be invested in people based on the image they project; and it is connected to knowledge.

*Power is about control.* Across all focus groups, participant responses suggest that they strongly associate power with authority and control. The degrees of that control varied from having total control over a person or group of people, to having influence over a group or individual. Alex equated power with the total control associated with a dictatorship, "power is the right to take charge over a certain group of people" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06). On the other end of the spectrum was power as influence; AJ defined power as "the ability to have influence over others" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Most of the focus group participants agreed that power is inherent in a position of authority, and saw that it was equally expressed regardless of whether the authority was perceived to be legitimate or not. For example, a teacher or police officer, according to participants, has legitimate authority and thus inherent power. In the same way, a student in a group who assumes the role of leader is also seen to be the authority and as such has power, even though s/he was not "officially" voted into the role. This is what participants see as illegitimate authority. Participants consider expressions of power by legitimate authority as "real" power that one must heed, while any expression of power by those who assume positions of authority can be ignored without consequence (when giving examples of situations in which one assumed authority, participants meant lay people in temporary situations, not of instances or circumstances in which an individual assumed a governmental position as in a political coup). One specific example of illegitimate authority is the self-proclaimed leader of a group or team. Pat shared that he experienced a student assuming the leadership role frequently in group situations and the group goes along with it as long is it's just one member of the group assuming the

power role, but "if you get two people that want to be in control of the group, it really can clash and things are a lot more difficult" (GTA, mixed group, 12/6/06).

Legitimate authority is ascribed to individuals who hold positions in which it is inherent, such as the police officer or teacher. Additionally, most students associate authority with status and/or age. Money and status were commonly seen as criteria for authority. According to Marilyn, money is the very definition of power (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). The idea that money gives people power is so strong a belief that when asked about the primary motivation for being in college, the most frequent response among participants was the ability to earn a lot of money. In addition to status and money, many participants ascribe authority to anyone older; Narissa believes that "generally, if you're older than me then I figure you have more authority and therefore more power than I do" (undergraduate group, 12/01/06).

In associating power with authority and control, most participants perceive it as a negative thing, especially in situations where the individual in the position of authority is seen to abuse her/his power. Many participants shared examples of how they thought teachers abuse power. This perceived abuse took many forms, from the more obvious, such as a teacher openly ridiculing a student, to the more subtle, such as a teacher's unwillingness to discuss a student's grade. Randall's perception of abuse falls into the latter category:

> I think of it [power] in a negative context...how it's being abused. Instead of taking the time to engage in dialogue with the students, [abuse of] authority is the teacher not giving the students a choice about anything. If a student disagrees, then the teacher doesn't give them a choice, like if a student has a question about a grade, rather than discussing it, the teacher just says, 'that's the grade.' (GTA group, 12/5/06)

It was surprising how many participants shared that they had teachers who were not open to students' questions and ideas about assignments, discussion topics, or even grades. This is precisely *not* the way Freire (1970/2003) believes learning should occur; rather, the ideal learning environment is one in which the teacher "presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own" (p.81). The type of learning environment participants described is consistent with the "teacher as possessor of power" model used in the "power in the classroom" research in instructional communication. In this model, any attempts by students to question are labeled as resistive behavior. Freire (1970/2003) would label a teacher in this scenario as "oppressor" in that the student is seen as the object or repository of the information and knowledge the teacher imparts. Both of these views are problematic in that they cast the student and teacher in opposition to one another and create an apparent one-way flow of power emanating exclusively from the teacher—the teacher is the oppressor and the students are the oppressed. Trying to understand power from this viewpoint is, according to Foucault (1980), "wholly inadequate to the analysis of the mechanisms and effects of power that it is so pervasively used to characterize today" (p. 92).

In perpetuating a view of teacher as oppressor, students continue to cast themselves as powerless in the classroom; they don't believe they have any power in their own learning. Sheila agrees with this, and sees students as subservient to the teacher when teachers do not give them a say or choice in their own education, which her understanding of power illustrates:

> When I think of power, I immediately think of powerlessness, of being on the other side of the spectrum. Whoever it is that has the power and you're dealing with them, then you have to be subservient. In the student/teacher dynamic, it might make you feel powerless because you can't really do anything other than what they're telling you to do. (GTA group, 12/05/06)

It seems that the participants who view power as a negative phenomenon had previously experienced its dominating effects. According to Foucault (1994), the powerlessness felt by students is not a result of the teacher teaching students and "transmitting knowledge and techniques to them" (p. 299). Rather,

> The problem in such practices where power—which is not in itself a bad thing—must inevitably come into play is knowing how to avoid the kind of domination effects where a kid is subjected to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher, or a student put under the thumb of a professor who abuses his authority. (p. 299)

Although they did not use the word "domination," it was clear from their responses that participants believe that when a teacher abuses her/his authority, the result is students feeling a sense of domination and powerlessness. This belief, as well as the fact that most focus group participants understand power as negative, illustrates that their understanding of power is based on a domination/control model. As such, it is not surprising that they see power relationships as hierarchical.

*Power is hierarchical & situational.* Several participants commented on how power was structured in hierarchies, that people have specific roles and positions in the relationships which, even if unspoken, are clear and generally obeyed.

> I think in a lot of situations you automatically kind of know your place...immediately you say, "oh, you're the researcher or the interviewer or interviewee" and then like we're instructors and he's a student. And even though we don't say, "well we have more power or not" we have kind of ranked our roles in these situations, and then it shifts so when I go in front of my class, I'm the

> instructor, or when I'm the daughter, it's situational, there is definitely some sort of order. (Mason, GTA, mixed group, 12/6/06)

Based on the their definition of power as a possession, most participants agree that there is an inevitable hierarchy that is sustained and maintained based on the amount of power one is seen to have or not have. Participants agree that one's position or rank and the amount of authority s/he is perceived to have are two indicators of how much power one possesses. An additional determinant of power, at least the perception of power, is the image one portrays.

*Power is about image and admiration.* For several students, their definition of power went beyond someone with authority and control to include the image one portrays or the amount of admiration one receives. "Image how someone comes across; like in the media when you see a person and they're supposed to be powerful, it's just kind of automatic even though it's not stated. I think it's the image they put across" (Paul, undergraduate group, 11/28/06). Max agreed with Paul's assessment of image and added that what you wear contributes to how much power others attribute to you, in other words, Max believes that "a tie is more powerful than a sweatshirt" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). He believes this because it is his personal experience:

> The way you come across to people will determine the amount of power they think you have. Like the way I dress [slacks and ties], a lot of people don't dress maybe [in the same way], they don't think they're on the same level. They think I might be a teacher or something like that. So they don't talk to me very often unless they know who I am. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Max's account suggests that participants assume others have power or don't have power based on their appearance. This was a common belief across all focus groups and seems to indicate that this understanding of power is based primarily on perception rather than

actual interaction and experience. This relates back to the association of money with power and, according to participants, these "give" one power in the sense that when an individual has money or projects an image of authority, other people treat her/him accordingly and thus ascribe power to her/him.

In addition to image, most participants agreed that admiration was also a factor associated with power. "When you have a group of people that admires you and kind of looks up to you, I think that gives you some power because they listen to what you have to say" (Mandy, undergraduate group, 11/28/06). A specific example of this is the charismatic leader of a school group who can get people to go along with her/his ideas and plans. Many participants shared experiences of being part of a group with such a leader, and/or the leader of such a group themselves (these experiences are further discussed later in this chapter). Another example of admiration came in the form of intelligence and knowledge, and many participants saw having knowledge as a form of power.

*Knowledge is power.* While several participants equate power with knowledge, it is from the perspective that having knowledge gives one power. No one sees the reciprocal nature of power and knowledge as Foucault described it, that each is a necessary component of the other; knowledge is created through the exercise of power, and knowledge produces power (Foucault, 1980). Participant descriptions of the knowledge/power relationship demonstrate, once again, the belief that power is a possession, and one way to possess it is through knowledge. Participants attribute the amount of knowledge one has to the power others perceive in her/him. Some see

knowledge as powerful because it allows them to outwit an opponent, while other participants believe that those with knowledge are inherently powerful.

> How intelligent you are can really, like, turn around situations where, like, someone is bigger than you—they can't go into force. You're on campus in high school and if you start fighting, like, security guards and cops are going to come and get you; well that's what's supposed to happen. If you can verbally defend yourself and be more, like, better at argument, you make them look really stupid even though they're like twice your size. (AJ, undergraduate group, 11/ 27/06)

Several participants believe that knowledge is what allows someone to assume authority and control over other people. For example, Jean Luc believes that "Knowledge is power because it can be used for manipulation and control" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Isabella agreed, "The more you know and the less other people know, the more you can control them because you have something that they don't" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). For Felicity, the only people she perceives to have any power over her are those who have more knowledge than she does.

> I think power has to do with how much you know. The only people who I feel have power over me is if they know more than me, or if they can do something that can hurt me in some way." (Felicity, undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

While participants have slightly different takes on power, most of them understand it to be a possession that one has or doesn't have. When an individual "has" power, that person also has the authority and the ability to control others.

*Resistance Defined*

Based on their understanding of power, participants also believe that, when one individual or group in a position of authority controls or dominates another individual or group, the natural inclination is to rebel against or resist that control.

*Resistance results from domination and control.* In defining "resistance," participant responses remain true to their belief that power is a possession; when asked the question, "what is resistance?" the majority responded that resistance is the inevitable response to power that is used as a means of controlling others, "[resistance is] responses to power, like a group of people not adhering to what another group of people think that they should be doing" (Alice, undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Participants see resistance as opposition or defiance in the face of another's attempts to exert power. According to John, "resistance is the opposite of power. To me, when I hear power, I hear peer pressure and that's when resistance comes in...when you don't want to be part of that large group" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Most participants see resistance as a force or tension; a pushing against that which they believe is restricting or limiting them in some way.

*Resistance is a tug of war.* "What comes to mind [when I hear resistance] is tug of war, just like one person is trying to do something and you don't want them to do that so you're resisting" (Nerissa, undergraduate group, 12/01/06). The "tug of war" metaphor would seem to indicate that there is a back and forth involved in resistance, a give and take per se; however, most participants do not see it this way, rather than a back and forth, they believe there is a strong, repressive force of some kind, and resistance is trying to stop that force. In other words, an entity exerts some force that is clearly directed to a specific target, and that force is what is resisted. "In order to resist something, someone would have to be either pushing it on you or this thing would have to be set over you and you make a decision, so opposing a dominant entity" (Pat, GTA,

mixed group, 12/06/06). This "dominant entity" is seen as individuals, groups, structures, and even societal norms. For Hurley, resisting norms is an inherent part of his definition of resistance, "I think resistance is going against power, going against what the norm is" (undergraduate, mixed group, 12/06/06).

*Resistance is a form of power.* Many participants see the act of resisting itself as inherently powerful. When a person resists, they exert a specific type of power that can ultimately lead to change. "Resistance is powerful. When you resist something you're fighting against something that's usually more dominant, so when you fight against it you are standing up, you are being powerful" (Marilyn, undergraduate group, 11/28/06). Mandy also describes resistance as powerful, and she believes that you have to have courage to resist. "I think it takes courage to resist. You wouldn't be resisting something unless you kind of have that power that she [Marilyn] mentioned and you would probably give in, so you have to have courage to resist" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). It is interesting in these descriptions that participants seem to understand power as a positive thing, which was not the case when they directly defined power. Based on their understanding that power is a possession, the inevitable association participants make is that those who have power use it to control or dominate others; which is what they perceive to be negative about power. When they see resistance from the point of view of someone standing up for what they believe in, and the effect is some kind of change, then power becomes a positive, non-dominant force. This misrepresents resistance as non-dominant and suggests that participants do not see that institutions or establishments can be resistant, which, according to Foucault, is not the case.

*Experiences of Power and Resistance in Academic Settings*

Focus group members recalled many ways that power and resistance were expressed in an academic setting. It is interesting to note that, when asked for examples of their experiences, most participants reflected back to high school. There were several examples from college, but the experiences participants had in high school made the strongest impressions on them. This could be due to the fact that approximately 75% of undergraduate participants were first semester freshmen. Another possibility could be that participant shares indicate that they felt more controlled in high school; they lacked the freedom to leave campus during the school day, to decide what teacher to take, what time their classes would be, and whether or not they attended class. These are all choices they were given in college, which some participants believe gave them more "freedom." The smaller number of experiences shared of power in college does not mean that participants do not see power in higher education, they do, it's just that the discussions about experiences of power and resistance centered more on high school, where experiences of power and resistance were a daily occurrence.

*Vehicles of Power in School*

Participant responses, once again, reflect the power as possession paradigm; rather than expressing the variety of ways power permeates the school itself, their language puts power in terms of how much of it is possessed: how much power particular students or groups of students have; how much power teachers and administrators have; how much power is attributed to the physical structure of the school. I believe that this understanding of power as a possession is so pervasive, that, while participant experiences do reflect power as more complex than simply a tool they or

others use to control, they have not been exposed to language that articulates and defines power in this way, thus, they continue to use the terminology with which they are familiar. So, although participants did not necessarily see students as "vehicles of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98), I have chosen to use that heading in order to reflect a broader understanding of power within which their responses fall.

Across all focus groups, participants agree that there are clear distinctions and categories of which specific groups on campus have power in the school; students, administrators, staff, teachers, and even the physical structure of the school itself are perceived to exert some sort of power. An interesting distinction is that, although the categories are common for all participants, the specific experiences of power differ based on the particular school environment. For example, one student who moved to a private high school in her junior year after attending public school all her life saw dramatic differences between the two: "the power shifts when you're paying" (Vanessa, undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Vanessa refers to the fact that, in her experience, students don't express much power in public schools; however, in private school students do wield power a great deal. This is, according to Vanessa, due to the fact that the parents/guardians of students in private school pay a lot of money for them to be there—another example of equating power with money. Paul's experience in a public high school supports Vanessa's perception that students in public schools don't have any power:

> I think high school in itself is kind of like a power struggle because they're just very strict, especially where I went to school. I went to school in East Side San José and they have a premonition that all kids are there because they have to be, not because they want to do something [with their lives], so it's just kind of for

> four years straight you're just kind of locked up. It's just "this, this, this" and there's no getting around it. It's like you have no say in your own education. That's not good; that's a very bad way to go about it. I've heard of other people, I have cousins or whatever, and they don't go to school in this area and they're like "my high school experience is great." Mine was terrible because I just had to do basically whatever they said for four years straight. (Paul, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

In his case, Paul believes students have no opportunity to express power of any kind; they are simply subject to whatever the teachers and principal want. Paul clearly felt controlled in his school environment, but he didn't feel that there was really anything he could do about it; he felt powerless. This could be due, in part, to the fact that he attended a school that was populated predominantly by lower income minority students, and the overall intention of the school, according to Paul, was to keep students from getting into trouble off campus. Thus, the school was highly structured and disciplined. While many other participants attended schools similar to Paul's, the majority of them did perceive students, at least to some extent, as vehicles of power within the school.

*Students as vehicles of power.* While there is disagreement about how much power students actually have, the majority of participants believe that at least certain groups of students wield power, even in a public school setting. The students seen to be powerful fall into three distinct groups: the tough kids, the popular kids, and the athletes. Participants who perceived the "tough kids" to have power attended urban schools where they say gangs and student violence are issues on campus; these students are perceived to have power because of the fear they instill in other students and faculty members.

> People who had power in my school were like the baddest kids I guess cuz one day, I was talking to the principal and some boys were cussing him out and he was scared, I guess cuz he thought they might steal his car again or some shit, right? So, I don't know, I saw the principal ain't running that thing…they scared

> what the kids are gonna do to him, we can all just walk out, we just do whatever we want to do. (Princess, undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

In this example, the power Princess perceived the "baddest kids" to exercise was more of a physical imposition of power—they scared others into doing what they wanted them to do, in this case, the principal leaving them alone. In this situation, the disciplinary control exercised through the institution of the school itself as Foucault describes was superseded by the power of the tough kids; this particular group of students was somehow able to turn the tables on the principal and, as a result, are perceived by the rest of the school as the ones in control. This is the most extreme case of students as vehicles of power; most focus group participants attended more suburban schools where there were not issues with student violence. In these cases, participants saw the "popular students" as vehicles of power. The "popular students" are the kids that other students admire. Many of the examples indicate that these students participate in student government, are involved in extracurricular clubs and activities, or are perceived to be in close relationships with teachers.

> Every activity that was going on was mainly determined by the [student body] officers and their in crowd people. When you kind of like acted individually or wanted to do something different, you wouldn't be heard because they would still do what they want to do. I felt like in high school, if you weren't in the popularity group you won't have any say in anything like where the prom is going to be or what it's going to be like...and if you wanted to be with them, you have to act like them, dress like them, be in the in crowd. (Mandy, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Many participants agreed with Mandy's perception of the popular kids having power. Different participants had different groups of students on their campuses that were considered to be popular; however, participants agree that if a student is popular, then

s/he has more power than other students, the effects of which often resulted in other students being left out of group activities, clubs, and other student gatherings.

> It's like a popularity contest. I know a lot of people are really good and they can do the job really well, like being on student government, but they did not get voted in because they weren't in the in group. (Vincent, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

These sentiments were expressed across all focus groups. The most admired students were also perceived to have the strongest affect on people as a result of their power. One of the effects of this power is the ability to influence other students, "...about the popularity, I mean what gives someone power - admiration. So without people wanting to be them, there wouldn't be power" (Marilyn, undergraduate group, 11/28/06). Ways the admired students influence other students include determining how they dress, for whom they vote in school elections, and what groups they join. Some of the popular and admired students were also perceived to have close relationships with teachers, which resulted in the power to do things like choose the kinds of student events and activities to have on campus and getting into higher level classes. Paul stated, "There are some opportunities, but you kind of had to be in the in crowd to do that...it's that, and it's also if you're in with the right teachers you can get into the classes" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06).

Another popular and powerful group of students in several of the participants' high schools are the athletes. In some cases, this is the group perceived to be the most powerful on campus.

> Athletes have power. I've had great power in high school because I was on the football team and stuff. In chemistry I probably would have gotten a "C" but because I was an athlete, and the teacher loved the football team, I got a B+. I

> knew I failed all the tests, I just knew I didn't get that grade, and then, you don't get in trouble...if we got a referral or detention, the dean would just say "all right"—and the dean just happened to be the head football coach—he would just say "all right, you just have to stay for extra conditioning after practice, you're fine." It never went on our records. (Bob, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

About half the students agreed that the preferential treatment many athletes received is testament to the effects of their power; however there are a few who disagree, including one student athlete:

> I played football and I got no special treatment, none. Like the principal and the teachers were like cool, but we had this policy were you couldn't wear hats or whatever, which was so stupid. I wore hats every day or whatever and they told me to take them off and I'd go "yeah, okay" and then put them right back on then they'd take it away. I got like 50 hats taken away and I played football, it's ridiculous. (Jean Luc, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

One factor that could have contributed to the different experiences, according to Jean Luc and Bob, is that Bob attended a public school in an upper middle class neighborhood, and Jean Luc attended an urban school in a lower income, minority school district.

It is interesting that participants locate power within a group of students more than with individual students; they see power with the athletes, the popular kids, the tough kids rather than in any one student. This suggests that participants do not ascribe agency to the individual, rather, it is the group that is the vehicle of power and, as Fassett & Warren (2004) describe, "the self is outweighed by the social" (p. 30). Without a sense of agency, there is little that one can do to question the existing power structures and relationships. This description further illustrates the fact that participants do not see that power permeates the whole school, including individual students. Thus, this understanding of agency reflects participants' feelings of powerlessness.

*The power of the physical structure.* In each undergraduate focus group, participants mentioned the physical building and structure of the school as exerting a controlling power. Most of the schools the students attended were closed campus, meaning that the students were not permitted to leave the campus during the school day. While this was a rule imposed by the administration, the students ascribed the power to the place itself and several referred to the feeling of being locked in by the school as similar to being in prison. Additionally, the bell was another part of the physical structure seen to have enormous power over the students.

> In relation to high school, I would say the bell had a lot of power, because the bell rang and you had to go to class. If you were late to class, then you got a tardy, and if you got three tardies that was an absence, and if you got three absences, then you were dropped a letter grade. Always the bell. (Narissa, undergraduate group, 12/1/06)

John agreed, and his feelings about the power of the bell were so strong, he went on to anthropomorphize it, calling it a dictator.

> I went to public school my whole life and we always followed a bell schedule; so the bell rings and that signals that it's time to go, then it rings again and everyone should be by their seats. It's kind of like the bell is a dictator and we all follow what it tells us to do. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

These examples of the power inherent in the structure of the school itself are consistent with Foucault's descriptions of disciplinary power. This power is what began in the prison system to maintain discipline and control over the inmates, and has been, and continues to be, reproduced and maintained in various institutions around the world, including the school. This is not just a phenomenon unique to high school; many participants shared that, although the bell does not ring on campus at San José State University, they still feel the same pressure to move quickly between classes so that they

are in their seats on time for the next class. A couple of students said that they wished there was a bell in college because without one, they were totally thrown off and had a hard time getting to class on time. Vanessa shared,

> Some people who are used to the bell schedule, not having a bell you kind of lose control. They [her friends] force themselves to have an 8:00 AM class, a 10:00 AM class and they force themselves to have [classes] scheduled back to back…they still create that kind of schedule. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Vanessa's friends struggled in the first months of college to incorporate self-discipline similar to the discipline that the bell had effortlessly imposed upon them. Alice, however, had a different take on the bell's absence from college,

> The idea that we don't have the bell system in college gives the students more power because before it was just like, even if the bell did ring, the teacher was like, "the bell doesn't dismiss you, I do." By taking away the bell, you can kind of leave whenever you want, so I think it adds more power to the students because they get to choose when they can leave. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

While the bell may be absent from a college campus, the institutional structure, the buildings, and even the setup of the classroom with the teacher in front and students seated in neat rows, all serve as mechanisms of control just as on a high school campus. These disciplinary control mechanisms, while not intentionally designed by teachers, administrators, and other campus staff, are still relied upon to help maintain student discipline in the classroom and throughout campus.

*Power as situated with administrators, teachers, and campus staff.* The final group that participants deem powerful is the administration. According to most of the participants, when referring to high school, "the administration" includes principals, teachers, coaches, and security guards. When discussing experiences in college, participants also see "the administration" as an entity that exerts power over them;

however they describe it as the bureaucracy and systems within the institution and clearly separate from teachers. According to Mason, a GTA in the mixed focus group,

> The times I felt most powerless was not with instructors, it's more with the administration. Like going to one window and knowing you have to go to the Bursar's office, and then you have to speak to the manager of whatever and you have to go through this door, and it's like you're really powerless in a way because you're trying to follow the rules, but the rules change each window you go to. (12/6/06)

This is another example of the way that the structural set up of the institution itself controls students. Another form of control the administration building has, as does any public institution in which numerous individuals wait to be served, is the corralling of those waiting in line. Before you get to the windows Mason described, you must stand in rigid and clearly delineated lines, specific lines for specific windows. While this may be seen as a method of efficiency, the main function of roping off and designating areas in which to stand is control.

School administrators have a variety of mechanisms they incorporate to effectively control students. Participant perceptions of the power exercised by the administration varied depending on the specific school. For most participants, the principal is the member of the administration with the most power. The exception to this was the experience Princess had at her urban high school in Oakland where, as previously described, her principal was not perceived to have power because he was afraid of the students. This was not the case with Paul, who clearly saw his principal as powerful, "When the principal walks around, you put everything away and you just stand there" (undergraduate group, 11/28/2006). In JD's school it was the same, students perceived the principal's exercises of power to produce clear effects throughout the school.

> The principal actually had power at our school. If there were people out of line he'd suspend them or have them arrested if they had weed in their lockers or they found it on them, or they found them smoking. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

In addition to the principal, JD believes that security guards and probation officers are also vehicles of power, "there were security guards on campus as well so I feel they held the power and we had probation officers there too" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). These examples further demonstrate how participants associate power with authority; they see those individuals who hold positions of authority as powerful. While participants occasionally felt the effects of a principal or security guards exercises of power, the teacher is the person that most participants related to on a regular basis, thus, there were many more shares associated with perceptions of teacher power.

*Perceptions of teacher power.* Participants definitely saw teachers as vehicles of power; however, the perceived effects of that power covered a broad range and differed significantly between high school and college teachers. While participants have different perceptions how teachers express power, the majority believe that there is a certain amount of inherent power in the position of teacher itself. Felicity likens the inherent power of a teacher to a computer game:

> They have power just by virtue of them being in their position, which doesn't necessarily mean that they deserve that power, or that they should get the respect that may come with that position, but it's there. I guess you can compare it to any kind of RPG computer game; you start with a certain amount of skills and games, I mean you can die or you can advance, but where you go from there, you can go down or you can go up, but you have an initial [starting point]. (undergraduate group, 12/1/06)

According to Felicity, and several other participants, teachers are powerful simply because they occupy the position of teacher. Just as in a computer game, there are factors

that increase or decrease the strength of the effects of that power. For example, dress, teaching style, and relationship with students are factors that contribute to how much power students perceive teachers to have. According to focus group participants, if a teacher isn't respected by her/his students, then s/he is not perceived to have significant power. This means that, although there is an inherent power associated with the position of teacher, not all teachers are perceived as equally powerful. Narissa believes that the way a teacher dresses and how s/he understands her/his own power influence how much power students perceive her/him to have.

> The way a teacher dresses impacts how much power I feel like they have. The teachers who dress up for class and who look like they're in charge I respect more than the ones who come in jeans and a tee-shirt...every teacher has power just because they're a teacher, but some have more power than others because they know that they have power and that knowledge gives them more authority and it makes students respect them more. (undergraduate group, 12/1/06)

This understanding relates back to associating power with the image someone portrays; Narissa believes that if the teacher projects a confident, professional image, then she gives that teacher respect and perceives her/him to be more powerful than other, less formally dressed and confident teachers.

Participants have a wide range of perceptions as to how, exactly, teachers use their power, and the corresponding effects of that power. Most believe that, although teachers can hinder students' academic progress through the grades they assign, their uses of power don't really result any significant effects. There were several exceptions to this belief, including two participants born in Vietnam where, according to them, teachers had absolute power and authority over students. According to Vincent, who went to elementary school in Vietnam, "the teacher is always right, you have to listen to the

teacher 100% and they discipline you with violence; they hit you so it's pretty much you have to listen to them" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). JD and Hurley both agree and, although they didn't experience any American teachers using violence, they still perceive them to have absolute authority in the classroom.

> Back in grade school or high school, you would walk into the classroom, sit down and you'd act a certain way. The teacher would punish you if you didn't act a certain way. Being quiet and having to raise your hand, that kind of thing would be the power in the classroom. (Hurley, undergraduate, mixed group, 12/06/06)

Hurley's example is based on his experiences in elementary through high school. He doesn't feel the same about college; although he believes there are controlling teachers in college, overall Hurley thinks that the way a student experiences teacher power in college depends on the particular kind of class and personality of the teacher as opposed to strict disciplinary rules of order imposed in elementary through high school. For example, the fact that attendance isn't mandatory in college takes an aspect of control away from the teacher. JD agrees; however, because he feels that disciplinary control has been so ingrained in him, he still follows the discipline established prior to college.

> Mostly all my life teachers have been basically having a dictatorship in the classroom, students never really had power. Now I guess it's just like the same. Even though in college we can come to class or not, or whatever, I still try to come to class a lot even though I don't have to, it's like something that was just put into our heads. You come to class. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

This example demonstrates the effects of disciplinary control on an individual. Even though no longer in the institution in which the behavior was learned, JD still adheres to that same discipline, although there is apparently nothing forcing him to do so. This is exactly the desired effect of institutionalized mechanisms of control. When describing the effects of Bethem's panopticon, Foucault (1977), explained its purpose was to "assure

the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its desired effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action..." (p. 199). In the same way, students behave according to the disciplinary controls that they learned throughout their educational lives, particularly in elementary, middle, and high school.

Some participants believe the enforcement of disciplinary control in high school, and the perception of "absolute" power in teachers and administrators, is due to the fact that, at least in high school, the students are minors. According to Jean Luc,

> In high school, most people are minors, but in college we're all adults, so as an adult you're not gonna, most adults have pride or whatever [so you're not going] to let someone else be superior to you. Yeah, like we're all adults so we're more level. In high school they kinda look down on you, "we own you" or something, you know? (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

There were also differences of perceived teacher power between college and high school teachers; one area of difference is the way a teacher assigns grades. Most of the participants believe high school teachers have more power over the grade than do college teachers. Some believe that all of high school grades are mainly subjective, "You could get like a C on everything in high school and if the teacher likes you, or on the last day you cry or something then they'll give you an A" (Max, undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Isabelle concurred that high school teachers grade using personal criteria and could give a student a good grade based solely on the personality of the student, "yeah, or you're a football player or you're someone who has power at your school [you can get a better grade]." Grading subjectively is a way that Alex perceives high school teachers use power, which results in more control over students, especially students whose goal is to graduate and go on to college because the teacher could hinder their progress. If students

didn't have the goal of graduating, then, according to Alex, the teacher would have little power.

> I still think teachers have a lot of power. I treat the teacher like she's my mom, you know, because I need the grade. It depends on the person, where they want to go, if they want to get out of high school, if they really want to graduate, really want to do something with their life. There are people who don't really care, so power does nothing to them. Teacher's power does nothing to them. Depending on the student, if he wants to graduate and go to college, then he pays attention to the teacher because the teacher can block your progress. The student has power if they just don't care. (undergraduate group, 11/ 30/06)

Most focus group participants believe that, once in college, they are graded more objectively; their college teachers do not grade based on personal criteria as much as their high school teachers do. While they agree that college teachers have power over the grade, many participants see the teacher as fairly low in the overall academic hierarchy. According to Alice,

> Even if teachers do have the ability to decide what grades to give students, in the end they're just one ring down the ladder to what really controls the teachers. And students, yeah, we kind of have the power, but in the long run we really need that education to really succeed in life, so in the end, I think that both parties just kind of go along with what is expected out of us. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

JD agrees that teachers don't really have that much power, even in regards to giving a grade.

> I don't think they have that much power, I mean it's basically like going back to high school: you had to graduate in order to get to college. Either you're going to be held back, or you just weren't going to graduate. But here you're paying for it. It may not be yours, but it's being paid for by financial aid or whatever grants you took out, but you gotta pay for it. I think it's like the student who has power. You're going to do what you're going to do and it's not necessarily... [the teacher is] just there to inform us and teach us and give us assignments. But as far as power for your grade, it's all on you [the student]. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Bob also believes that college teachers have less power than high school teachers, but he sees it as largely due to the fact that, in college, the students evaluate teachers and this evaluation can affect a teacher's career.

> College professors don't have the power that high school teachers do because high school teachers, you don't evaluate them, they have more job security; their performance isn't graded by an actual student. Whereas in college, most professors...yeah you have the couple, "no late assignments" but most professors as you continue, as you get into upper division, and they're much more lenient. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Isabelle disagreed with Bob's assessment; she believes that college teachers have more power than high school teachers.

> You can't turn in a late assignment to the teacher in college. If you try to weasel your way out of it, if you're like "oh, I was sick," they're kind of lenient, but not so much. Usually there is no make up work on tests or quizzes. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Princess agreed that one of the ways a college teacher expresses her/his power is by not allowing students to make up work or missed assignments, and that this perceived inflexibility indicates, at least to Princess, that the teachers don't really care about students.

> Other teachers are hella mean though. You feel me? You know how [one instructor is] hella cool where [that instructor] gives extra credit or you can make up something if you do bad on the test or whatever? Other teachers don't do that, if you do bad you do bad. Like in classes with hecka people, they don't even know your name. And they be like "who is you?" You feel me? You know, so you're like "oh well." One of my teachers said "if the A's win the game, I'll probably give you a better grade." (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

It is interesting that, according to Princess and Isabelle's comments, a teacher's policies are seen as uses of power; if the teacher is not flexible in accepting late work or does not provide extra credit opportunities, the participants see this as a sign of "having more

power" than a teacher who is flexible. From a teacher's perspective, providing this kind of flexible policy is an example of an effect of exercising power.

In addition to policies, several participants understand college teachers' power to include the ability to influence beliefs, to impose their own ideas on students, and to silence those who do not agree with those ideas. Marilyn experienced this in one of her political science classes:

> Although I am totally against the war in Iraq, we had a paper on the war and if you didn't write it the way the teacher wanted you to write it, you got an F. So my first time I actually got a D on the paper and then I had to re-turn it in with all her ideas and I got an A on it. So, it's pretty much in that department its very liberal and you have to feel what they feel or else you're not going to do well. The teachers and the department had the power and even though we were supposed to show our ideas and how we feel, really we we're supposed to feel what they wanted us to feel. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

In Marilyn's example, a teacher used her/his role as an opportunity to influence the beliefs of students. While Marilyn shared a similar position to the instructor, it wasn't close enough. According to Marilyn's account, until the paper included the specific ideas of the teacher, she did not receive a passing grade. This is a problem that many participants shared, that a teacher tries to influence beliefs rather than accepting alternative positions. In so doing, the teacher is treating the student as objects, the repositories of her/his particular agenda and politics. Unless students are allowed to either accept or reject those positions, the teacher is abusing the authority of her/his position. This is not to say that teachers cannot influence students in positive ways. For instance, Elvira's fifth grade teacher made a big difference in how the students thought about standing up to racism and ridicule from other students. "I remember how she [the teacher] used her power to tell us that if we ever get made fun of, we had the right to

punch someone in the nose" (GTA group, 12/05/06). In this example, while the teacher is imposing her belief, the student is not going to be graded poorly if s/he does not incorporate that belief.

Another way teachers use their power, according to participants, is when they deny students the ability to speak out in class or ask questions regarding course content. Jocelyn had just had an experience in one of her college classes of the teacher silencing a student: "...one of the students was trying to give her opinion about something but the teacher didn't listen, she just put everyone down. So I guess she had power" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). This example describes what participants see as abuse of power, and a way that teachers dominate students in the classroom. In addition to influencing ideas and controlling student expression in the classroom, AJ believes that college teachers exercise power by controlling behavior in the classroom, even more so than high school teachers.

> In high school you can goof off and stuff and the teacher can tell you to be quiet, but they can't really do much else unless you do something really bad then they can kick you out. But here in college if you're talking and the teacher is talking they're just like "what are you doing?" And then you're just like "oh, I'm talking." And they're like "if you're going to talk, then just get out." They can tell you to leave cuz you don't have to be there. So in the classroom setting, they have more power. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Bob agrees, and also thinks that college teachers' power extends to the curriculum. He believes that college teachers have a lot more power over the curriculum than high school teachers do. According to Bob, in high school, the curriculum is set and the teacher has to use a specific book and grade based on standard criteria, while the college instructor, on the other hand, decides "how they teach the curriculum, they teach how they want,

they grade how they want, high school is pretty set up for you" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06).

According to participants, the most common effect of a teacher's power is control. In several shares, student motivation was also an effect. Narissa thinks that teachers must exercise power in order to motivate students to do the work.

> If teachers didn't have power, then students would not be motivated to do the work. I think power is necessary because a lot of people wouldn't do things if there wasn't some authority figure over them. I know a lot of people could learn this stuff on their own, they could buy a book and sit down and study it, but they don't...You come to college so the teacher will say, "okay you have to read this chapter and you're going to have a test on it by the next class," which will motivate people to do it. So power is necessary to motivate people. (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

According to Narissa's comments, if teachers didn't use power to control students, and to carry her argument out to the level of the school itself, if there were no disciplinary control mechanisms built into the educational structure, then no student would even bother attending class. This illustrates just how ingrained disciplinary power is in our psyches; some people do not even notice that a problem exists, that they are, in fact, not free agents in their own education; rather, they are what Foucault (1977) refers to as "docile bodies" being acted upon by the forces of disciplinary control. Indeed, instead of seeing the apparatus of control acting upon her, Narissa believes it would be a problem if control mechanisms did *not* exist. Since they do, since our educational institutions serve to maintain power relations that produce mechanisms of control, there is also a corresponding resistance to those mechanisms.

*Expressions of Resistance in an Academic Setting*

Several participants see resistance as a form of power itself, or, as in Francesca's case, inseparable from power, "I really see them kind of coupled; you can't have a complete definition of power without resistance" (GTA group, 12/5/06). However, most see resistance as a response to the effects of power. Participants shared many ways in which they resist in an academic setting. Their examples of resistance behavior came from both high school and college and include resisting what they refer to as "the system," pushing back on imposed rules and regulations, and resisting in the classroom.

*Resisting the system.* For several participants, high school is a system that you must understand in order to navigate it successfully. Many participants found it necessary to "work around the system" in order to achieve personal goals. The "system" participants described is, in fact, the disciplinary control mechanisms within the institution that Foucault discussed. The fact that participants understand and describe this, even without the specific terminology, indicates that they do realize power is more complex than their words may indicate. One student clearly acknowledged the surveillance mechanism inherent in his high school when he spoke of a type of class where students prone to getting into trouble are put in order to keep an eye on them. Paul called these classes "sheltered" and "babysitting" and working around the system meant the difference between getting stuck in them or moving on and graduating.

> I was in a history class, they apparently just lumped me in there because they needed the slots to be filled, cuz that's how the public system works; you need that many people in a class, you need to pack it as full as possible. It was a sheltered class, meaning it's the kids that don't care. I was kind of lumped in that class and you just kind of have to work around that otherwise you'll never get out of there...You kind of have to befriend the teacher almost where you can kind of say, for example, "this quiz isn't working for me" or "what are we doing with this

> book." Stuff like that; you actually kind of had to take the reins in that situation because they're not going to do it for you, especially if you're in a class that's destined to fail, as in the case of a sheltered class. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

The reason these classes are "destined to fail" is because the focus is more on keeping the students out of trouble, rather than on student learning. The students in these classes have already been labeled as those who "don't care" about their education, so the class is set up to keep an eye on them and prevent them from causing trouble elsewhere. This labeling of students is itself problematic. As Foucault argued, discourse is powerful since it perpetuates and distributes the effects of power. When a school, such as Paul's, refers to classes as "sheltered" or to students as "destined to fail" the need for such a class at all is perpetuated. The language we use is powerful; according to Fassett & Warren (2004), "It is our contention that educational identities—what it means to be a teacher and a student (and the success or failure of those performances)—are products of strategic manipulations of power buried deep in our everyday talk regarding education" (p. 36). It is through these "strategic manipulations of power" that educational identities are created and perpetuated.

In addition to labeling students and controlling the types of classes they can or cannot take, there are other ways "the system" controls students. Vanessa found herself resisting the system when she decided she did not want to follow a set course of study, which, at her particular school, included oceanography.

> Another type of resistance is when someone is forcing you to do something, like they're trying to force you into a certain program in school, like they're saying "take oceanography, do this, oceanography, it's going to be great." But I don't like oceanography, how about I switch? "Switch? You're going to lose all your credits and you're going to do this and this…." In high school they try to mold a

> student. If you want to be in a high honors class in my high school, you had to be in the oceanography program. The problem with that was you didn't take a history class so when I switched in my junior year I was missing a whole year of history. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Vanessa's resistance ultimately resulted in her changing schools. Paul, however, didn't have the option to change schools and had to figure out a way to resist being lumped in a student category that did not reflect his goals. For most students, changing schools is not an option, so they continue to do what they can to resist what isn't working for them, including rules.

*Pushing back on rules.* School rules were seen by all participants as impositions of authority meant to control student behavior; therefore, resistance was a natural response to these rules. Participants offered a variety of examples of how they resisted school rules. At AJ's closed campus school, each lunch period consisted of students trying to leave and security guards trying to keep them on campus:

> My school was closed campus, which means you can't leave at all. Like during lunch, it was always like security guards and police versus whoever was trying to get off; it was always like, it was always a big issue every single lunch. (undergraduate group, 11/ 28/06)

Another way students resisted the rules was to cut class or wear a banned item to school. JD found a way to "legitimately" miss classes.

> A lot of students cut at our school, like I know I cut. It was a lot easier to if you were in sports. The teacher wouldn't check the roster so I would say "oh, I'm going to my track meet." (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Several participants who engaged in these types of resistance activities did so because they believed it was their right. They felt that the rules were simply a means to keep students under constant supervision, and didn't take into account the individual students.

> When I cut class, I just felt like I was doing something that I should be able to do, go to class if I wanted to or not. I was pulling good grades too, I pulled a 3.3 by the end of the year, but they're still cracking down on me for not going to class when I don't even really need to. (AJ, undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

As far as AJ is concerned, the point of high school is to learn what is necessary to move on to college. If a student can do this without attending class everyday, then that student should not be required to attend class. Participants agreed that the attendance policy in high school was mainly there to keep kids off the street. Some students were so far ahead of others, that they were completely bored in class.

Another common rule across participant high schools is the banning of particular items of clothing. Many shared that this is a rule they frequently resisted. At Max F's school, where wearing hats was against the rules, the students united and resisted the rule until it was overturned.

> Our school had that same rule [no hats]. I personally didn't wear hats, but I think people did it anyways and a lot of people complained to their parents and eventually they got the rule overturned by popular demand, so I guess that's resistance. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Participant examples of student resistance indicate that when students are united in their expressions of resistance, they have power. They feel, and the results indicate, that the effect of using power in this way is a change in an oppressive situation. Max explains it like this: "I think sometimes the idea of unions or something can affect the classroom, because as one person you don't really have any power...but if everyone did then they have the power" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). United efforts by students are seen as positive examples of resistance, while an individual student's cutting class is seen more as an expression of frustration and not a real conscious resistance decision. On the other

hand, when a student performed an act in direct response to an exercise of power in the classroom, this was definitely seen as conscious resistance.

*Resisting in the classroom.* The majority of personal experiences of resistance in an academic setting focused on resistance in the classroom. For most participants, resistance took the form of a student or group of students resisting some effect of a teacher's power; however, there were a few GTAs who shared experiences of a teacher resisting students in some way. For example, Randall, a GTA suggests:

> How about pinning resistance on the instructor's side, we already defined it from the student's perspective, but can instructors resist? You can't have one without the other because resistance is a reaction to power. So, if someone brings up a suggestion, or even if our students may voice something in class, like during the SGIDs [Small Group Instructional Diagnostic] that they would like changed in class. We [as instructors] may resist that change, resist adapting to a suggestion someone [a student] makes to us. (GTA group, 12/05/06)

This comment drew much agreement among the GTAs. While they all strive to create environments in which students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and suggestions, they also experience a bit of resistance when those opinions/suggestions call for a change in the way they teach their class. GTAs also shared how they perceive their own students resistance in the classroom. A common perception of resistance is non-participation. According to Elvira, resistance is "...a non-participatory attitude in class. I think that's a form of resistance, just not participating. They just sit there and they're present, but they're not participating" (GTA group, 12/05/06). Shor (1996) describes what he calls the "Siberian Syndrome" which is the way students position themselves in the classroom so they don't participate. "Siberia" is the name Shor uses to indicate those spaces in the classroom farthest from the teacher, spaces in which students try to distance

and detach themselves from the class. It is an intentional choice made in an attempt to resist the authority of the teacher. According to Shor, "Posed as a site of resistant agency, Siberia functions for students as a means to cope with and to undermine the official culture of schooling and the authority of the teacher" (p. 25).

Most focus group participants, both GTAs and undergraduates, agreed that non-participation was a form of resistance. This is one of the more subtle, passive forms of resistance that is enacted in the classroom. Other expressions of resistance included more overt forms such as blatant defiance and questioning a teacher in class. Although the expressions and forms of resistance varied among all participants, each one agreed that, at least once, they consciously resisted a teacher in some way. Examples of blatant defiance include refusing to do what a teacher asks. Isabella saw this type of resistance as a way of pushing the teacher until they are forced to "use their power."

> I think the more a teacher tells you to do something, the more she wants you to be quiet, the more you want to talk to piss 'em off. To see how far you can push their buttons before they are going to take some action and use their power. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

This example suggests that a student can manipulate or "push" a teacher in a way that forces her/him to exercise power, the effect of which is control over the students. Sammy gave an example of how his direct disobedience of a teacher's instruction resulted in that teacher's attempts to control his behavior.

> The teacher told me to go to the office because I was doing my usual goofing off and stuff. I was just sitting there and she's trying everything she can—I feel bad for her at this point—she's trying everything she can to get me to listen to her and it's resorted to her yelling at me, stopping the entire class and it's her standing there telling me to go to the office in front of the entire class. She told me "you have until the count of 3" and I was still disobeying the power that she had; right when she was about to get to the count I said "I ain't going to no damn office." I

> still remember how angry I was when I said that. I got up and went back to my desk and stayed in my desk. At the same time, she held the power over me but I disobeyed her. (GTA group, 12/05/06)

Vanessa shared similar situations in which her teachers attempted to control her behavior, however, according to Vanessa, the teachers were mistaken about who was doing the "goofing off;" they would accuse her and even when she responded that it wasn't she who had spoken out or laughed or whatever the infraction, the teacher would not believe her. Her method of resistance, contrary to Sammy's, was not to argue with the teacher; instead she left the classroom.

> I would walk out of the classroom if I wasn't getting along with the teacher, I was never one to argue because I never cared that much. I always got A's and B's, so I would get frustrated when the teacher wasn't listening to me and walk out. For example, if someone behind me was talking and I told her it wasn't me and she'd say, "well it sounds like you," then she'd tell me to be quiet again, I'd just walk out. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

A possible factor contributing to Vanessa's teacher's belief that it was Vanessa making the trouble is that Vanessa is African American, a minority in her school. Vanessa's friends suggested that race could be a reason she was singled out as a trouble maker. "People tried to put it in my head that it was because I was black, I was like 'no, it can't be.' I didn't really care what the situation was; I just knew she didn't like me" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Vanessa's experience highlights the fact that personality plays a part in the student/teacher relationship. From my own experience, I can attest to this fact. Alex also believes his teacher treated him badly simply because she didn't like him.

> I remember when I was in high school I had this Spanish teacher, and I wasn't that good in Spanish, I would get C pluses and B minuses on the tests and one day she got in my face in the middle of class; she put her finger in my face and said I

> was going to fail and have to go back to Spanish 1. For a little while I just let it go, but she kept saying that every day and I felt stupid so then I talked back to her by asking why. She sent me to the principal's office and said I was cussing, but I wasn't. So teachers have a lot of power. I was calm, I didn't say a thing, I was just wondering why I wasn't going to pass when I never got anything lower than a C plus. I think resistance in high school, you can have it, but it's not going to go far because teachers and principals have power over everything. Clearly, in my case, I was doing the work, but I had no power to even question my grade. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

While many participants shared examples like these, times when they obviously resisted a teacher in some way, most had resisted in more subtle ways because they either saw resistance by students as futile, or they feared the possible consequences. Pat, a GTA, saw no point to student resistance, "...as a student if you choose to resist and say 'hey, you know what, I'm not going to do this' then the instructor says 'hey, you can get an F.' It's that simple" (mixed group, 12/06/06). Hurley agreed, "It's really hard to resist in a classroom because the teacher has the ultimate authority and power and they can just cut you out, then you have no power, you can do nothing about it" (undergraduate, mixed group, 12/06/06). Substitute teachers were the exception, and most of the participants did feel that substitute teachers had no power at all and therefore they felt free to resist any attempts to maintain control in the classroom.

Alex experienced the consequences of his attempts to question his teacher; he landed in the principal's office rather than feeling his concerns about his grade had been heard. To avoid a similar fate, Dave came up with a way he could resist without worrying about negative consequences, which, as an athlete, could mean that he'd have to sit out a game. His method allowed him to feel like he was making his personal statement and kept him on the playing field for football games.

> I learned in high school and college that teachers love participation and feedback. I would resist, if I didn't like a teacher and I knew they didn't like me, whenever they called on me I just wouldn't answer. I didn't have enough gall to walk out of class ... I felt like they would tell one of my coaches then I would have to miss a game and that wasn't worth it for a teacher. So whenever they called on me, even if I knew the answer, I would be like "I don't know." Then it would start a trend that kept going and nobody was ever talking which would get the teacher frustrated and was my way of getting back at them for them being foul to me. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Randall had a similar technique for resisting teachers he didn't much respect, "I wouldn't outright resist them and cause a disruption in class, but I would work on something else and that used to piss off a lot of my teachers" (GTA group, 12/05/06). This type of passive resistance was the most common type of behavior participants employed in their college classes. According to Mason, a GTA,

> [In college] most of resisting is going to be quite passive, it's not going to be really aggressive or assertive or obvious resistance because we're here to get a degree. There are goals we need to achieve and, in order to achieve that, we need to go with the flow of the institution and so the resistance is going to be mild, it's like "let's not rock the boat too much." (mixed group, 12/06/06)

Hurley agrees with Mason, that students don't want to rock the boat too much; they are more concerned about getting their degree than with resisting control strategies implemented by teachers. Thus, Hurley's method of resistance is a passive one; his procrastination is his way of resisting, "I'd always resist doing homework and essays until the last minute, and yet I would get a decent grade on it. It's like the procrastination is reinforcing itself with good grades, but in a way I see that as resistance" (Mixed group, 12/06/06). As far as Doug was concerned, these passive examples didn't really constitute resistance at all since it college is really about the student.

> I don't think there really is any resistance because you go to class and its all about you; it's not about your professor. You're doing your own work, if you're

> resisting the professor its really no use, you're there and you have to basically do what they say because you're paying for the class and you need to get good grades and get your credits. I mean you're there for a degree so basically you have to follow what they say and do all the assignments and all that. I don't really think there's room for resistance because it's about you, focusing on yourself, doing whatever you can to get your degree and get out of the university. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

While he saw resistance as contradictory to the reason students are in college in the first place, Doug did cite one way that he believes students can resist, "You can resist by changing schools if you want to. If you're not happy in your college, you can go somewhere else, but you can't do that in high school" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06).

Another way participants passively resist is by complaining about their teachers to their peers, "Maybe amongst peers, a way of resisting is when you get into groups and you end up having these bitch sessions and you talk about all the things that you don't like about the teacher" (Mason, GTA, mixed group, 12/06/06). While this type of resistance usually doesn't amount to any changes, it is a way participants feel they can express themselves. When it actually came to putting their words into action, Pat, another GTA in the mixed group, explained that, "resistance occurs verbally, but when it comes to putting it in action, you usually just buck up and do it" (12/06/06). I think Mason spoke for most participants when she said, "I think it's more like in our minds we know we're rebels, but right now we have to get our degrees" (GTA, mixed group, 12/06/06).

While participants shared that they resisted in middle school, and some in high school, most of the experiences focus group participants shared occurred in college. According to Shor (1996), this would suggest that students become more resistant as they

age. An increase which Shor sees as due to the fact that, by attending institutions in which discipline and control apparatuses are incorporated into the very structure of the institution, students are made to conform to the specific identity of student ascribed by this structure. Thus, students are what Shor calls, "political and intellectual exiles" (1996, p. 42) who become more resistant as they progress through the educational system. I question whether, in fact, students actually resist *more* in college than in elementary through high school. Perhaps they simply express resistance differently in college, or maybe their resistance prior to college was not conscious. In any case, the disciplinary structures within schools would suggest that, while there are abundant opportunities to resist, it seems that there would be no occasion when a student could exercise power; however, based on the shares from participants, this is not the case. In addition to feeling powerful when resisting, such as the group of students who united to have the rules changed at Max F's school, several participants shared that they did, in fact, experience feeling powerful in situations other than when resisting.

### *When Students Feel Powerful*

As previously stated, many participants believe that some forms of resistance are expressions of power; however, when asked for specific examples of when they felt powerful as a student, not all participants could come up with one. There were several situations when they felt that, as students, they did have power. These situations include when the student is known among the greater student body and faculty, when there is a substitute teacher in the classroom, and when students feel that they have a say or choice in the course content.

*Being Known is a Kind of Power*

Several participants shared that they had power as a student when they were known on campus by the other students as well as teachers. This came through involvement in campus activities such as participating in clubs, student government, or sports, as well as reputation. According to Vanessa, her involvement in clubs is what gave her a sense of power.

> At public school it was hard to get something like a club going. There were 5000 students, so you didn't really know too many people. When I went to private school there were only 300 people, so if I wanted a club, all I needed to do was get one student and one teacher to approve it. I started the poetry club and became president of the poetry club, then I got on student council, and then I was like in photography. I was in all kinds of clubs and then students started noticing me, even teachers I didn't have. Because I got to know all of them, I got a little more power because when I got in student council, I had connections. I was closer to the faculty and the administrators. The more I got involved, the more I had political power, I could voice my opinion and what I feel like is going on. They wanted to have this thing on Fridays, but no one was going, so I said "why don't you do it on this day at lunch time and everybody would already be there?" And it just so happened to be successful. So having that little bit of clout and being more involved, people know you then you get more power because people know your face. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Vincent had a similar experience of being known on campus; he didn't belong to a lot of clubs, but he was well known among teachers, and students looked up to him because of his apparent closeness with those teachers. In his words, he believed his experiences of power were due to his reputation of being "in favor" with the teachers.

> I did feel powerful at some point, when you're in favor with the teachers other people would give you respect too, they would come to you for help. They respect you, they stay out of your way…it kind of sounds conceited, but it's just that you know more. If you're in favor with the teacher there must be something that made you in that group. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

What Vincent is describing is a connection between respect and power. According to Vincent, he is respected by teachers because he is smart and does well in all his classes.

When other students see this, that he is "in favor" with the teachers, as well as knowledgeable, they treat him with respect. There is a power in this because when he asserts himself or his ideas in some way, other students are willing to go along with him since they have that respect for him. They will listen to him, as well as seek him out for support and help with course content. Excelling in course content made Max feel powerful in many of his classes.

> All the way up until recently, the teacher would check in with me from time to time, like "are you getting anything out of this class because you don't look like you really have to try for what you're doing." In my digital photo class a couple of years ago, I was probably the laziest person in the class–I am still today the laziest person I will probably ever know–so I put off my assignments until the day before they're due, even the morning before they're due, but just with my ability I was able to pull something together that's equal to or even better than the average in class. The teacher would look at that like "it doesn't seem like you need my help at all." And so, in numerous classes I have been offered to do things beyond the curriculum. That does give you the feeling of power because the teacher feels like you don't need to be in that class. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Several participants had similar experiences with feeling powerful as a result of knowing more than the rest of the class. The fact that students associate feeling powerful with having more knowledge than their peers indicates that, although not all participants made the connection when defining power, they do understand that there is a relationship between knowledge and power; specifically, with knowledge comes power. They understand that when they have knowledge, when they know more than other students, that gives them power; however, what they do not see, is that power creates knowledge; they miss the reciprocity of power and knowledge. Thus, participants were most concerned with having knowledge. Sometimes this knowledge was of the course content, and other times it was having information about a teacher, such as the fact that they are

new to teaching, or a substitute. This information about a teacher offered students multiple ways to express power in the classroom.

*Power with Substitutes and NewTeachers*

Participants shared that they believe they did, at some point in their educational career, exercise power in the classroom when the teacher was a substitute or brand new to teaching. For some participants, these were the only times they felt that they had any kind of power as students.

> ...the kids kind of end up taking over the classroom, those really weak, timid substitutes, just laughing at them, doing whatever, just messing around. That would be the only thing of like feeling power that I can think of, in that situation. We looked forward to the substitutes. (Hurley, undergraduate, mixed group, 12/06/06)

Mason likened high school students' response to substitutes to sharks smelling blood in the water, and Pat expressed some remorse for previous behavior towards substitute teachers. "I remember those days...it's always the substitute teacher who you can just totally take advantage of anyway, right? It's never the [fulltime teacher]. I look back and I just think 'poor, poor, whoever,' never fails" (GTA, mixed group 12/06/06).

It is interesting that students did not bring up harassing substitutes in the discussion on resistance. The fact that they did bring this example up when sharing experiences of feeling powerful as students suggests that, more than they actually stated, they do see resistance as an exercise of power. This is likely due to their associating power with domination and control. If the regular, day-to-day environment in the classroom is one in which the teacher has the control, when that mechanism of control, i.e. the teacher, is removed from the scenario and replaced with a part-time substitute

who the students see as powerless, then the students see the opportunity to turn the tables and become the "controllers."

Students felt powerful with substitutes because they were able to harass them, whereas with new teachers, they felt powerful because they knew more than the teacher. Participants shared that they felt power because they could easily manipulate and convince the new teachers to change the course content to what they wanted. Vincent assumed a teacher-like position and was given the respect of the position by his classmates when a new choir teacher started who didn't appear to know what he was doing.

> I was president of the choir. The teacher was brand new; he just came in. I knew the teacher before him, and I know what's going on, so almost I was like the second teacher there. So that kind of gave me power. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Other participants shared similar examples of getting a new teacher to change course content. Marilyn spoke of a time she had a brand new teacher for a class and how she, and the rest of the class, would get her to change the syllabus and assignments.

> We had a teacher last year, she was new and she was actually new to the country too, so we said we didn't want a test; everyone said they didn't want it and she said "okay, let's do it next week." Because she didn't know what she was doing, she wasn't ready for the class. So if you stick together, then the students have power. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Most participants agreed that students have more power collectively than they do as individual students. According to Max A, the collective power of students is influenced by unions. He shared an example of how an entire class came together to make a statement about a teacher they had.

> I think sometimes the idea of unions or something can affect the classroom, because as one person you don't really have any power. But there was one teacher; I think there was something wrong, like poor grading standards. Everyone in the class met and talked about it and they came up with a plan that they were all going to walk out of class at the same time. Because if just one person walked out, the teacher would be all "okay, you failed." But if everyone did then they have the power. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

This example is similar to one that appeared it the discussion on resistance, when a group of students from Max F's school came together to get a "no hat" rule changed. Clearly, focus group participants feel powerful when they are resisting, in Max A's example above, the students did not agree with the grading standards imposed by their teacher, nor did they feel that the teacher gave them any say or choice in the matter, so they walked out. Participants see having a say in a situation and the ability to make their own choices as ways of exercising power.

*Power in Having a Choice*

Participants believe they have more power in college than they did in high school due to their ability to make choices about how they participate in the process of their education. One of these choices is whether or not to attend class; at San José State University, attendance in class in not mandatory; it's up to the students to decide for themselves whether or not to go to class. For many participants, this freedom of choice was a new experience, one that gave them a sense of power.

> Coming here to college as a freshman myself, I feel like I have a lot of power; there's no one here to tell me what to do except myself. All the power is in my hands; I can control my life. I can control if I want to go to class or not. I don't believe the teacher has half the power; of course some teachers do care if the students come or not, but then it's not up to them anymore. It's the students' money; they can do whatever they want now. (John, undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Participants also believe that the opportunity to evaluate their teachers through the formal school rating system as well as informal networks, such as "Rate My Professor," is another way they have power as students and make decisions about which teachers to take. At San José State, completing Student Opinion of Teacher Effectiveness Surveys (SOTES) are ways students use their power because they believe their responses ultimately affect a teacher's employment.

> Professors, most that I have, are nicer to you because you affect their job. We just did that thing today [SOTES]...in my freshman year I had a comm. class and the guy was a total dick. So when he left the classroom we all united and we all failed him and he wasn't able to teach here again. (Bob, undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

The ability to evaluate a teacher gave participants as sense of power. They all believe that the formal evaluations they complete in their classes, do, in fact, make a difference and can ensure that a "good" teacher stays, and a "bad" teacher is fired. It is interesting that, according to participants, they associated this power more with punishment than reward; they see it as a way to get a back at a teacher they don't like or find ineffective. This was especially true of the informal sites such as "My Space" and "Rate My Professor." All focus group participants regularly complete the formal SOTES, however, only a few had gone to a web-based teacher ranking site to rate their instructors. Those who took the time to go online and rate a professor did so because they really disliked the professor and wanted to make sure other students didn't get "stuck" with her/him.

While participants see rating a teacher on informal, web-based sites as a way of expressing power, using those sites as a tool in deciding what teacher to take is a more

common way participants feel powerful as students. The following dialogue from the mixed focus group on 12/06/06 is an example:

> Mason, GTA: I would think that maybe some of these rate my professor or rate my students would be a place where students can exercise power, have your voice be heard about the instructor. I've not done it; I've never gone on and rated one of my teachers.
>
> Pat, GTA: I've never done it either.
>
> Mason, GTA: When you read really nasty things you think that student exercised power.
>
> Hurley, undergraduate: Mostly it gives you power over who you choose.

This "power over who you choose" was echoed among most participants as a way they feel powerful, although they also agreed that the scheduling of required classes makes it difficult to actually get their desired teacher. It is the power in having a choice in their own education that seems to be most important to the participants in all focus groups.

One way students feel they have the power to participate in their educational process is when their teacher gives them a say in course content, a real choice, not a situation in which they just manipulate a new teacher to have their way as previously discussed. Narissa was pleasantly surprised that her teacher not only listened to student suggestions for course content, but actually incorporated those suggestions into the syllabus.

> I remember the first day of class, some of the students in the Shakespeare class are theater majors and they requested that we switch *Edward III* with the *Taming of the Shrew*. [The teacher did] so I really felt like the students had power to influence the teacher as to what the material will be. And [another instructor will] give us the vote as far as what kind of final we have. Ultimately it's up to the teachers to decide, but we have some power. (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

Based on participant responses, this ability to influence course content happens infrequently; most of the time teachers do not listen to the student suggestions, or if they do, they don't make any significant changes to the course content. According to Freire, this method of teaching prevents inquiry by the students and situates them as objects, "to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects" (2003. p.85). Thus, it should be no surprise that participants did not feel that they had much power in an academic setting.

While students do have the choice of whether or not to attend class and can evaluate their teachers in college, these choices are logistical in nature rather than substantive ways students participate in the process of their own education. The kinds of choices students are able to make are options within the structure of the institution. According to Nathan (2005), whose ethnographic study *My freshman year,* explored college life at "AnyU" from the perspective of a student, "Beneath differences in daily routine was a set of decisions that students made, and underlying their decision was a set of options built in to AnyU and in to the structure of the American university" (p. 38). These "sets of decisions" students made include the choice of major, residence, specific class section, and type of meal plan. In addition to having no direct effect on their education, the multiple palette of options students face is problematic. Nathan (2005) argues that implications from what she calls our "over-optioned" public university system are that it leads to life in which there is "little automatically shared among people by virtue of being in the same university," and "the university 'community' becomes both elusive and unreliable" (p. 39). In other words, while students do have the "power" to

make their own choices, the choices available to them are all related to their daily schedules, routines, and living situations. Since there are so many of these options, few students have enough overlap in their schedules and routines to develop strong community. Finally, none of the options available offer students the choice of how they participate in the process of education itself, which is why participants in this study feel mostly powerless in a school setting. This feeling of powerless in the process of their education echoes how they feel outside of an academic setting.

*Experiences of Power and Resistance Outside of an Academic Setting*

Just as in an academic setting, participants don't feel they have many experiences of power and resistance outside of school; most participants don't think that they have any power at all. According to Princess, "We ain't got no power, if we had power stuff would be going the way we want it to go and I'd have my health insurance, that's not the way we want it to be" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Bob agrees that people don't have any real power, other than within their immediate situations.

> Basically there are two ways to look at it; from a local perspective over your brother and sister, over individuals in school you do have power. In terms of physical presence, I don't want to say I was a bully, but being larger and being an athlete, when you walk around campus you see it, you can intimidate people. Same thing in your family, if you have younger - I have six nephews - I have power over them because I'm older. My brothers and sisters are older than me, but because I'm bigger than they are, I can beat them up. But on a national scale, people don't have as much power as they think they do. People want to talk about protesting and strikes...My dad was in a strike for UPS. He did it for a year or so, and they just hired new people. In terms of immediately around you, you can have power, but on a national scale as an individual, you really don't have as much as the constitution and they say you have. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Bob relates power to age and size within his immediate family and school life. He feels he has power because his size intimidates and allows him to influence others. The

experience of his father's replacement after going on strike makes him think that people don't really have any control over their situation. Even though we are all endowed with certain rights by the constitution, and "they" (teachers, politicians, other authority figures) encourage us to speak up and make a difference, Bob doesn't believe anything one person does makes a difference. Other participants agree with Bob's assessment and believe that they don't really have much power in the world. The family, and to some degree, work are the exceptions.

Within the family, participants agree with Bob in that they feel they have the power to get their younger siblings or relatives to do what they want them to do. Several had experiences other than influencing younger siblings; one participant had to assume the central authority in the family; Mandy was forced into a position of power after her father and brother died.

> When my father passed away when I was 14, my brother kind of took over for the family and did what my dad did, and then when I lost my brother, I had to do that because no one in the family went to college so no one understood anything and at that age it is kind of hard and I had to learn everything so quickly within such a rapid time, but I adjusted to it and kind of got used to it. In other words, I felt I was in charge of the family because everything they needed they would come to me and ask my opinion and I would go out and find the answer. That's why I felt I had the power in the family; I had to take control of the household. Basically I was taking over what my dad and brother were doing. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Randall shared a situation in which he felt powerful in the family when he finally stopped allowing his "part-time" father to have any control over him.

> My parents loved to exert power and authority over me. When I was little, it worked...at a certain point it was just like, "well, I'm your father, you have to listen to me." And I was like, "no, I don't." He's like, "I paid your child support." And I was like, "yeah, after we took you to court." (GTA group, 12/05/06)

Randall chose to move away and go to school rather than be around his father. That was his way of exercising power in a situation he found oppressive. Elvira, another GTA, had a similar experience. Moving out of her domineering mother's house gave her a sense of power.

> I love my mother to death, but growing up, especially in my teenage years, she was very controlling and I felt like she just wanted to have all this power over me...What I did was save up money at 18 and I moved out when I was 19. (GTA group, 12/05/06)

Both Randall and Elvira said no to being controlled by their parents. Saying no is a way that Max F exercised his power at work:

> There's this employee who just came back and he thinks he can run the place. He wanted me to take hundreds - about 500 digital pictures of guitars to put on their website that they're building up. He's like "we'll come in and that would be good cuz you're going to be on the clock." At the same time I'm like, "I'm a photographer and I'm not going to labor myself that hard for $8.00 an hour." To take photographs of all these guitars I have to light them and I have to do all the color correction and all that kind of stuff because that's not what a photographer works for. Basically I went to him and I went to the boss and I said "look I'm not going to do this unless I get a different pay for this project." And they understood that. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Max F felt powerful by saying no; he did not let the supervisor take advantage of his talent as a photographer. His was also an example of the power in resistance, since he resisted the authority of his supervisor.

Specific experiences of resistance outside of an academic setting were also rare. Many participants talked about how they really didn't have the ability to resist in their families due to the ramifications that resulted. This was particularly the case with Narissa, whose parents did not abide any form of resistance.

> I'm not very good at resisting. I was kind of punished for that when I was little. If you directly contradict your parents then there is a punishment for that; for me,

> they took away all my books for a month. I didn't want to go swimming, I was at a girl scout camp and they all wanted to go swimming and I just wanted to read my books and I was like "I don't want to go swimming, I don't want to put on my swimsuit." They kept asking me and I finally got to the point where I just said, "No, I am not going to put my swimsuit on." So they called my parents. My parents took away every book in my room, hid them, and then came and picked me up. (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

This example helps to explain why Narissa doesn't resist in school. Her parents were very authoritative, and it is interesting that the teachers she most respects are those who are similarly authoritative. Pat agrees that parents set the tone for how a child will relate to perceived authority.

> I think your relationship with your parents establishes an understanding of authority and you go into a classroom and you see a teacher as an authority figure, or you see a law enforcement officer as an authority figure, or you see your boss as an authority figure and I think all these things we learn, whether or not we know it, we learn when we are younger and that way when we get into the classroom, it's already known. (GTA, mixed group, 12/06/06)

Paul shared that he never really tried to resist the authority of a teacher because of how his father brought him up.

> I don't think I've ever tried to attain the power role in a classroom. I think my ultimate goal was to be on par with the professor or teacher or whatever, just to be on the colleague sense. I mean they're there for a reason and you're there for a reason. It's not the other way around, I mean that's the way I look at it. And that's probably because of the way I was brought up with my dad. My dad was always like you're never higher up than your elders, like respect your elders - that was always drilled into me. When you're brought up that way it sticks with you, you can't lose that. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06).

Mandy also believes that the way she was raised affects how she is in the classroom and outside. As a child she was strictly disciplined, and as result, she never resisted her parents or any type of authority figure, including a teacher. According to Mandy, if the parents are strict, then the child will be better behaved.

> If your parents were strict on you and disciplined you, I don't think the child would go to school and act opposite of that because it would always be on your mind. A lot of people say that Asian kids are very good and disciplined, but most of the times it's because of their parents, because they're so strict on the kids. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Felicity agrees that upbringing plays a part in behavior outside of the family environment; however, rather than not resisting in school or the world because she could not resist in her family, Felicity believes that it is because she was not able to resist at home that she resists in school.

> I guess why I resisted school is because I don't have a lot of options to resist in my life. I still live with my parents, I mean I have a job, but I don't make enough to have an apartment, so I'm completely dependent on my parents. While I do have the little altercation with my mom for the small things, for the big things I don't resist at all because I don't see I have any other options basically. Even all the times we moved, and we moved a lot. I've been to two high schools and a lot of middle schools. I've been to nine schools before here, and you don't really have any choice in that because you move and you go to a new school, a new district, new country, new city, whatever. I think that's why I take out my anger in academia because I don't have any real options to take it out in my real life. (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

Although most participants don't feel they had experiences of power and resistance outside of an academic setting, they all agree that the main reason for that was their upbringing. The way their parents raised them, the values they instilled as well as the discipline they enacted, continues to influence their decisions and choices today.

### *Factors Influencing Student Motivation*

The predominant instructional communication research on power in classroom suggests that teacher power strategies serve to motivate students. Based on the responses from focus group members in this study, in general, this is not the case. Participant responses discussed in the previous section suggest that upbringing significantly affects

their in-class resistance decisions; how a student is raised contributes to whether or not they resist, as well what types of resistance behaviors they enact in the classroom. Similarly, participants believe that their upbringing contributes to their motivation. Participants do not believe that teacher strategies play a significant role in a student's motivation to attend or do well in college. The exception to this is when the student likes the teacher, in which case s/he does feel more motivated to do well in class. Instructional communication researchers may call this a response to teacher immediacy, which it may, in part, be true; however, when participants spoke of liking a teacher, one of the things they say that they like is that the teacher is "real" and connects with students on a more personal level. This would suggest more than a teacher simply enacting immediacy behaviors in the classroom.

In addition to upbringing and liking a teacher, there are a variety of other factors participants attribute to their motivation to be in college, attend classes, and complete assignments as instructed by the teachers. Several participants stated that they, themselves, are their own motivation to pursue a college degree. It is their choice to be in college, and it is up to them to decide how much effort to put forth.

> In college I think the people who are here want to be here and they have a motive to be here. Everyone has plans after college so that's why everyone takes things more seriously in college. Everyone who is here wants to be here, it's their choice. (Mandy, undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Mandy, and other participants who responded in similar fashion, make a broad generalization of why students attend college. Some students, including participants in this study, are in college because they feel it is their only option. Some see college as the means to achieve their ultimate goals; it's not that they really want to be in college for the

sake of getting an education. Sammy is one example of a student who, at least in the beginning, didn't want to be in college.

> I kind of got tired of school; I didn't like school at first anyways. In high school I did it [went to school] because I had to, I went to college because I had to. I did junior college and I just got bored. So when I got to UCLA, I didn't buy any books, I stopped buying books. (GTA group, 12/05/06)

Sammy eventually decided that he did, in fact, want to be in college. This transformation happened after a friend of his pointed out that she thought he pretended he didn't care just so he wouldn't feel bad if he actually tried and didn't do well. So, in his case, Sammy's lack of motivation resulted from a fear of failure, not from a teacher using specific techniques or strategies in the classroom. It didn't matter if he liked the teacher or not, until he realized that he was actually sabotaging his own education and future, he didn't put forth the effort necessary to succeed. For Paul, students who come to college and slack off and don't succeed are ultimately just failing themselves.

> In college it's more that you do what you want. You're paying money to be here, you don't have to be here, there's no way that we can dock you for not being here, but you fail yourself if you don't come. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

John believes people are in college to fulfill their own personal goals and that is what keeps them motivated to do well and graduate. "A lot of people are motivated to go to college to fulfill their dreams and goals for the future, I think everyone has one of these goals or dreams that they want and that's what keeps them in college" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06).

According to the majority of participants, personal goals and dreams are only part of what motivate students, there are other, equally strong factors including parents and

upbringing, the desire for financial security, and, in some cases, teachers motivate them to do well in class.

*Teachers as Motivators*

The teachers that participants believe have influence over their choices as far as doing well in a particular class are those whom participants like, respect, or fear. When a student reported liking or respecting one of her/his teachers, s/he felt more motivated to please that teacher by doing well in the class. Isabelle stated it quite succinctly, "If you like the teacher you're going to choose to come to class more" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Participants expressed that they like teachers who clearly care about students, relate to them as people, grade fairly, are enthusiastic about teaching, and make class interesting. These are the qualities in a teacher that inspire students to attend class, and try to do well in that class.

> I definitely want to go to some of my classes more because the teacher is just more entertaining. Like some people just get up there and lecture and talk. Not like [one of my instructors] or something where [the instructor] just like talks to us, like asks us what we did over the weekend. [The instructor] treats us more like people instead of like "oh, you're my students, here's the information, here's the test on this day, just come in." You feel like you're being processed less and more just like taught. (AJ, undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

All participants agree that they like a teacher when they sense that the teacher is really interested in her/his students. Pat, a GTA in the mixed group, shared that he particularly likes it when his teachers would use common interest as a way to build rapport and help students understand course material.

> I think of friendship or mentoring, I've had experience with teachers where they'll offer assignments and it will be something where we have a common interest, and this may not be true for every student, but if I have a common interest, or there are things that they're into and I'm into and they use that as a way of getting me

> to understand what they want me to understand through common interest. (mixed group, 12/06/06)

According to participants, teachers convey interest and caring for students in ways other than having personal conversations with students during their office hours. For Marilyn, when a teacher lets students know when quizzes are coming, this is a sign that s/he cares about the students.

> My Comm40 teacher tells us, "We might have a quiz on Wednesday" to kind of warn us. Like it is in your best interest to come to class and to read the chapter because we might have one, instead of just having a pop quiz and then you're like "uhhhh" [choking sound]. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Participants agree that when a teacher demonstrates that s/he cares about the students, then the students care more about the class. According to Vincent,

> If they show that they care, then the students care more. Like my other teachers warn me about quizzes too, but most of the teachers in college don't care, especially in big lecture halls, they don't see anything, they don't even know you so you're on your own. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

In addition to respecting teachers who they perceive care for students, participants also respect teachers who combine structure and flexibility into their teaching style. While participants did agree that they like flexibility in a teacher, such as occasionally accepting a late assignment, they claim to have more respect for a teacher who holds students accountable for turning in assignments on time, which they perceive as an indication that the teacher cares about teaching the class and about the students.

> I think it depends on the way the teacher treats the students. If he's really strict...I know my MUSE teacher, he's not strict at all and a lot of times he'll have an assignment due and I'll blow it off until like two days later or I'll just skip class. He doesn't have that much power over students; he doesn't really care. (Alex, undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Mariah believes that the combination of strictness and enthusiasm in a teacher is what motivates students, "I think it's their structure that keeps you structured. If they're strict and enthusiastic...it's like we kind of mirror the teacher" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Enthusiasm is an important quality for a teacher to have, according to most participants. When a teacher is enthusiastic about teaching, then students are more motivated to attend and participate in class. For Vanessa, teacher enthusiasm is the primary factor that motivates her to put forth effort and do well in a class.

> If the teacher is motivated to teach, if they're motivated and enthusiastic...The chances of you missing that class are slim, because there are so many teachers sitting there (in droning voice) "Okay, page 237, blah, blah, blah" no smiles, nothing and the entire class is like, yeah, yawn. But in [one of my instructor's] class its like "how was your weekend? Do you need any help?" That's motivation to do things you don't want to do. But if you have a teacher you do not want to go to this class, she's so mean. She's so evil I do not want to go to this class. If she's enthusiastic, that's my motivation. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Enthusiasm is definitely a quality all participants appreciate in a teacher, but even if a teacher isn't enthusiastic, if s/he is thought to be a kind and good person, then that also helps to motivate students in the class. For Alice, a kind teacher is enough motivation to get her to class.

> My geology teacher is really boring, but he's such a good person; he really takes the time to answer your questions and really teach you the subject so I go anyway, even though it is boring. Just because he is such a good person, I feel bad not going. Even though I'm falling asleep sometimes, I still bear with it because you can tell he really does like the subject and he really does care about his students and he learned everyone's name in the first week. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

In general, according to most participants, these types of teachers, those who motivate students to do well through exhibiting a real interest in students and in teaching, who are kind and well respected, are the exception rather than the norm. According to Felicity:

> I've had a few teachers who I really respected and I really wanted to please them and I really wanted them to be happy with the way I worked, so it did motivate me to do better, to be better...But on the whole, not really, on the whole most teachers, at least for me, I've only been motivated enough to pass the class; I haven't been motivated enough to do innovative thinking or concentrate or study real hard so I would get an A. If I could study a little bit and get a B, unless I was really motivated by the teacher, then not really. (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

Narissa agreed with Felicity's assessment that there are not many teachers who actually motivate her to do well in a class.

> I say it's very rare that a teacher will motivate me to do a good job. I've had a few really good teachers, but I mean I can count on one hand the good teachers I've had. In high school I had an English teacher and he really motivated me to do a good job on things and he really encouraged creativity and he would let me do alternate assignments if I felt I could do them better a certain way. I guess it's usually English teachers I've had who will do that. There are a lot of reasons why I would get a good grade. My parents really want me to do good in school; when I was younger they would give me money.

While Felicity and Narissa believe that there are very few teachers who motivate them to do well in class, they also both agreed that those teachers who do motivate them do so through instilling fear in their students.

> The first day of school she asserts her authority right then and there. If you're like 30 seconds late to class, she'll be like, "why are you late to my class? That is disrespectful to me." If you continue to do that, like if you're 10 minutes late to class, she'll say, "leave, get out of my class, you don't respect me." And if you forget your book, she's like "why are you here without a book? That's disrespectful to me." I mean she scares people off... [But] I learn so much from her. Because she's so scary I'm like, "I have to get this assignment done, I have to be there on time everyday." ...The bad side of that is that if I am 10 minutes late, I don't show up for her class at all. I'm like "no way, no public humiliation for me." (undergraduate group, 12/01/06)

Felicity agrees that fear can be an effective motivator in a student's decision to show up to class and do the assignments:

> If you know that the person will punish you in some way, whether it be public humiliation or missing credits for that class, you know already they are a difficult

> teacher to please, so even if you did show up to class, and even if you do all the assignments it will still be difficult, so yeah, that's absolute fear that might motivate you to show up and do a better job.

Mason, a GTA in the mixed group, agrees that fear of punishment is a way teachers use their power to motivate students to turn in assignments, "penalizing you if you're late or you don't do something according to the standard... that's another way power is exercised to motivate you to be on time and do the assignment" (mixed group, 12/06/06). According to Dave, teacher motivation is a mix of what they assign, how they grade, and the way that assignments are weighted.

> In one of my classes the teacher gives homework but there's no credit, so let's be real, I'm not gonna do homework if it's not gonna to count for anything. Like in [my Comm40] class, now that 75% of our grade is coming up, you have to come to class more often, I mean because it's the majority of your grade. So what teachers give you, how much depends on your grade, like this final speech, I'm trying to get the best grade I've gotten on a speech because it's 50% of my grade. So I think it does dictate, the teachers, the grade, the homework that they give you, it does dictate what you will do. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

According to participants, a teacher's ability to motivate students is based on many factors. One of the key factors is that students perceive the teacher to care about the students. It is a bit puzzling that several participants agree that fear is an effective motivator in the classroom, which is contrary to a teacher who cares about the students. To me, using fear as a motivator suggests a strategy of domination and control. I wonder what it is that the students are actually motivated to do in a class environment that is based on fear. Does this motivation result in anything other than getting to class and turning in assignments on time? Are students able to ask questions, to inquire into the subject matter, or discuss their grades with the teacher? In a fear based environment, I don't see that students are actually motivated to learn or engage with the subject matter of

the course. To me, a teacher's instilling fear in her/his students is more about control than motivation. It's interesting that students didn't see it this way, or at least they didn't articulate it as such.

A teacher does have some influence on student motivation; however, participants believe that this is the least significant of all factors that contribute to their motivation. This belief is inconsistent with the "power in the classroom" research in instructional communication which suggests that teachers do significantly affect student motivation. According to participants in this study, the ability to earn money and respect after college is what motivates them to get a college degree.

*Financially Security and Respect as Motivators*

When asked "what motivates you to be in college?" every participant, at one point or another, indicated that the ability to earn a decent salary was one of the primary motivators to attend and do well in college. Without a college degree, according to participants, there is no chance of financial security, especially if they want to remain in the San Francisco Bay Area after graduation. This is true for Marilyn, who believes, "If you live in this area you have to go to college. If you don't go to college it's really hard to live here" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). Both Paul and Bob said that they are in college "So you can make more money than everybody else" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). The fact that a college graduate makes more money than someone without a college degree is a fact that participants have heard over and over again. According to Jean Luc,

> Society puts the big emphasis on education; if you don't go to college you're going to be a failure. Ever since we've been kids we've been hearing that, right?

> [Agreement among the group] This is how much a high school dropout makes and this is what a high school graduate makes, this is what a college graduate makes, they had those posters. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

For many of the participants, an undergraduate degree isn't even enough anymore; in order to really make it in this area and to get ahead, you need to pursue graduate education as well.

> Just in general, society and the norms and expectations that we have to really uphold an education. Especially right now, you can't just graduate from college, you have to have a master's to get ahead and you have to have all these things that weren't required before. (Alice, undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

In addition to a good salary, a college degree earns respect; according to AJ, "People respect you more if you have a college degree" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). This respect is important to Princess, who feels she was not given any respect in high school.

> People be so proud of you when they find out you in college and they be like "oh, we thought you was hella stupid." And then you be like "no, I'm not." That's fucked up. Hella people tell me that when I go back home. They say "we thought she was stupid, like when did you do your homework." (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Mariah was similarly motivated to earn respect,

> When I was in high school, people, unless they really knew me, thought I was stupid, so I got the jokes like, "oh, you'll be lucky if you can get into community college." That made me so mad. So I just kind of want to prove it to them, to myself, that I can do it. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

It is clear from their previous definitions of power that participants equate power and money. Therefore, the fact that they see the opportunity for financial success as a primary motivation to get a college degree is no surprise. Specifically including the desire for respect with money in what motivates them to get a college degree suggests that participants also associate respect with power. No one specifically articulated this

power/respect connection; however it is clear through their examples. If participants believe that a college degree will provide them with the opportunity to make money in the future, and that there is a clear connection between money and power, it is plausible to interpret the desire for respect as another way of being able to exercise power in the future. This desire for money and respect was something many participants said that their parents instilled in them. So, parents have significant influence on whether or not students attend college.

*Parents and Upbringing as Motivators*

For most participants, their parents and upbringing play a major role in motivating them to attend college and continues to be a significant influence in their choices to do what is necessary to graduate. Paul was raised to do his homework, he didn't question that and that is what continues to motivate him to do his assignments in college.

> When you're a kid in elementary school and you don't do your homework, you are the shame of the class... If you don't do your homework, your teacher is going to call your parents and then your parents will be like "why didn't you do your homework?" If you're raised that way it's going to stick with you. It stuck with me in high school and then still now. If I have homework, nine times out of ten, I'm going to do it. I'm a lot busier than I used to be, when you're a kid you don't have a job or anything to worry about. If you're raised to do what you're supposed to do in class it's inherently going to happen, regardless. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Jocelyn said that she really didn't have any choice in the decision to attend college, it was all her parents, "I am here because I have to be here. I live at home and so I have to come to college" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). This was the same for Mariah, she said in her family, there was no question of not going to college, it was the only option after high school, "My parents definitely played a big role, I grew up with 'you better go to college'

there was no other option" (undergraduate group, 11/30/06). Although Max F feels he did have a choice, he agrees that he is in college mainly due to his parents.

> Pretty much I guess my parents are the only real driving force as to why I'm in school. It doesn't mean I don't care about school, I enjoy it and I don't take classes I feel I won't enjoy...My parents both went to college and have a couple degrees, so it's just kind of common. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

Alice's parents also influenced her decision to go to college, but not because it was the only option as it was for Mariah, or because they have multiple degrees like Max's parents do, it was because they wanted Alice to grow as a person.

> ...she [mom] has strong opinions about education, she says you have to go to college and you have to get a degree, but it's more of what I'll get out of it and what I'll learn from going to college than where it will really take me, it's that too, but she just wants me to learn and grow as a person...By having this opportunity to learn more, you're giving yourself more power to what you can do in the world because you have that certain knowledge and you can decide what you want to do with that knowledge given to you. (undergraduate group, 11/30/06)

Alice again connects having knowledge with power, and so sees going to college as a way to gain power; by attending college she will attain knowledge which will give her power in the future. This power can be the ability to get a good job after college, as well as the ability to earn respect; for Alice, this includes self-respect.

While earning money and respect is important to Bob, he is also motivated to do well in his classes so his parent's continue funding his education.

> I have to make grades for sports, and then my parents added a stipulation, "yeah, we'll pay for your college as long as you maintain a 3.0." So if I don't make a 3.0, I have to pay for it on my own. So I actually go into all the classes whether they're boring as hell or not, it doesn't matter if the teacher is a fucking idiot or not, like our physics teacher, but, um, yeah, because I have to maintain a 3.0 so my parents will pay. (undergraduate group, 11/27/06)

Francesca's parents made the decision to go to college a financial one as well when they gave her an ultimatum: "I went to college by necessity because my parents were like 'okay, you're 18, you're either in college or out of the house,' so, duh, I was in college" (GTA group, 12/05/06). In addition to a parent's directive to go to college, two of the participants, both of Asian decent, expressed a strong sense of duty to their family as a strong influence in their decision to attend college.

> I think a lot of times people talk to you like you have to go to college, like it's the automatic next step after high school. And sometimes it depends on your past. I came to this country when I was about 3, but we were very poor when we came from Vietnam, so then my brother, he was going to college because he wanted to make good money and support the family. And for me it's the same way, since I lost my brother, now I kind of have to support my family. It could be something in your path, but it could also be something that was planned for you and taught to you since you were a kid, they just say that after high school you go to college and graduate. Some people just kind of take the initiative and do it for themselves because they know what they have to do. It's their duty. (undergraduate group, 11/ 28/06)

Vincent also sees going to college as fulfilling his duty to his family.

> I really agree with the duty thing because like my mom told me once, I was really surprised too, but she has everything set up for me. This is what you do in life and that's how it should be. So the way is set up for me. I guess I do enjoy being here. (undergraduate group, 11/28/06)

The variety of reasons participants shared as to why they are in college, and what motivates them to do well, indicate that there is far more contributing to how a student performs in the classroom than the research in instructional communication suggests. According to this research, students perform well in the classroom based on how effectively teachers incorporate behavior altering techniques (BATs) and behavior altering messages (BAMs). There are "positive" and "negative" BATs and BAMs; "reward from behavior" and "reward from source" are two techniques defined as

positive. Teacher reports indicate that, out of the seven overall strategies employed in the classroom, teachers employ primarily the positive type of strategies (Kearney, Plax, Richmond,and McCroskey, 1985). This would include grades; however, based on the participant responses, this is not a strong motivating factor for them. Reasons students strive for good grades, according to participants, are: an intrinsic desire to succeed; the desire to fulfill a sense of family duty; or to ensure that parents continue to pay for their educational expenses and provide a place to live. These factors are already contributing to student motivation before s/he ever sets foot in the classroom, thus suggesting that the BATs and BAMs teachers use may not do much beyond controlling student behavior in the classroom. If this is the case, then the predominant instructional communication discourse on power in the classroom continues to perpetuate a paradigm of education in which students are the receptacles of teacher knowledge, unable to critically think for themselves. This is not the environment that the GTAs interviewed in this study want to create in their classrooms; rather, GTAs shared that they hope to exercise power in a way that engenders an engaging, dynamic learning environment. While they each strive towards this classroom environment, in reality it has not been as easy for some of them as they initially thought.

### *Power as a Graduate Teaching Associate*

On December 5, 2006 I conducted a focus group of all GTAs. We discussed the same questions as in the undergraduate and mixed focus groups, with the exception of how GTAs exercise power in the classroom as a teacher; specifically, the final question I asked in this session was whether or not GTAs believe they exercise power in their

classrooms. All of them did experience the inherent power in the role of teacher, and they all take great care not to abuse that power. Randall noted that, while aware of his power, he also knows its limits.

> I am aware that I do have power in the classroom, but on the other token I realize I am not the parent of these people, I should respect them as adults. Yes I have the power, but that doesn't mean I have the right to constantly pound them over the head with it. Similarly, they have the power to leave the classroom and take the class another semester if they choose. So the way I handle it in the classroom is that you have a choice, it might not be the best choice in the world for you right now...I try to frame it as my power goes as far as deciding what your grade is, and even then that's limited to an extent. My power exists within this classroom with things pertaining to this classroom; anything outside of the classroom I don't have any control over it, that's your life, that's what you have power over.

For Sonora, the way students approach her reinforces her experience of feeling powerful as a teacher.

> I think I have power in the classroom. I know I do because I do have students approach me for really minor things and when they do they are very cautious about how they're approaching it with me, I can tell they've prepared. Right away they say, "There's probably not any way for me to do this, but..." The way I think I have my power is that I tell them, "Well, as I have said before..." And I refer back to what I said before and then say "So you can either do this or this." I give them a choice that really isn't a choice. Then they're stuck doing it the way I wanted them to do it originally or not getting the credit, so I try to make it seem like they're getting a choice, even when they really don't, then they feel better about it, like they're deciding.

The concept of choice, as previously discussed, is something that allows students to feel that they are able to exercise power in some way. Making the choice to attend class, to turn in assignments, to participate in discussions, and even what teacher to take provides students with opportunities to exercise power. Both Randall and Sonora understand the importance of choice. Sonora tries to create a choice for students, or at least the perception of choice. This may not be giving students a say in how the class runs,

however it is an acknowledgement of the student as an individual who can make decisions for her/his self. Both Randall and Sonora treat their students as adults, not objects to fill with knowledge. All of the GTAs in the group expressed their desire to treat students as adults; however Elvira also expressed frustration when it comes to maintaining order in the classroom.

> I like to think of it as, I like to see my relationship with my students as equals; they're adults. But sometimes I feel like I'm teaching high school; I have to shush them and call them out to be quiet. I'm working on that, trying to figure out ways so I don't call them out in front of everyone and embarrass them, ways to use my power more nicely, not as brash.

Francesca sees the power relationship between teacher and student as reciprocal, "To me power has always been influence, it hasn't been influence in that 'I have power and therefore I will influence you,' it's reciprocity; if you allow your students to influence you, then you're going to influence them more" (GTA group, 12/05/06). This understanding is consistent with Freire's concept of the teacher as student and the student as teacher; both influence the other and, in a truly liberatory pedagogy, both are transformed in the process (Freire, 2003).

The idea of transformation, of making a difference in the lives of their students is a goal shared by all the GTAs. Making a difference includes helping a student get over a fear of public speaking, helping her/him to better understand a concept, or even helping them with a personal concern outside of the classroom. Sammy shared his altruistic goals about exercising power in ways that leave positive effects on his students.

> What really attracts me about teaching and what I like most is when that student says to me "hey that was cool." Or when they say something and without them realizing, they're telling me something they've learned. For instance, this semester I helped one of my students, his parents got divorced and he has a hard

> time even affording school. He's telling himself "I should just quit school and go to work because that's all I really know how to do." I got him a job on campus... just one student who I actually affected and that makes me feel great...I think that's what attracts me the most about power, the positive influence you could potentially have.

The ability to positively affect students in some way is the primary reason that GTAs want to teach. They all clearly understand that the position of teacher is one that provides this possibility, and that power has something to do with that. While many GTAs articulated their understanding of power as something one possesses, they do realize that it is not really something that they have; rather, they see that it exists in the student/teacher relationship and in the authority associated with the position of teacher. It is how they exercise that power that determines whether or not they, as teachers, can have the positive affect on students in their classrooms that they desire.

### *Conclusion*

In addition to the altruistic goals of the teacher, she or he also needs to manage the classroom in order to create an effective environment for learning, which Elvira addressed in her example of trying to encourage students to pay attention in class. Thus, instructional communication research that offers teachers ways to better manage the classroom is useful. What that research doesn't do is offer better ways to understand how power is exercised and why students make the choices they do in the classroom. The previous analysis of the findings illustrates that students make decisions and choices based on myriad factors. Some of the factors that contribute to those choices are: how the student was raised; how she or he understands power and resistance; how she or he has experienced the effects of power in her or his own life; her or his motivation for

being in college; and her or his opinion of the teacher. In addition, the GTAs' pedagogical choices are also influenced by how they have experienced the effects of power throughout their own lives, and their desire to have a positive affect on their students. These findings support my belief that the complex histories and lived experiences of the student and teacher contribute to the communicative choices made in the classroom, not simply a teacher's use of a particular BAT or BAM. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of this study's findings, its strengths and limitations, and offer directions for future research.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

Part of the reason I chose to teach is the possibility of transformation; I believe I am transformed through the process of teaching, and, at least in some way, so are the students I teach. I experienced a great deal of transformation in the corporate training I did prior to returning to school, and once I began to learn more about teaching and pedagogy, I realized I had found a new career path. I was inspired by critical pedagogy and what bell hooks (1994) terms "engaged pedagogy." I'll never forget the way hooks' words spoke to me, "There is an aspect of our work that is sacred...our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students" (1994, p. 13). That is a profound understanding of teaching, one that I completely agree with; the role of teacher or trainer is sacred because we share not only our knowledge with our students, but part of our very selves and our students share parts of themselves with us. According to hooks (1994), "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). In other words, there can be no learning without caring for our students beyond how well they perform in class. In order to care for students, we must recognize that they are complex human beings whose decisions and choices arise from a reservoir of life history and experiences.

This is not the understanding of instructional communication's extant "power in the classroom" research, which, through its narrow definition of power as a tool used to manipulate and control, casts students in opposition to teachers. The choices and

decisions students make are, in this light, responses to a teacher's use of prescribed power strategies and techniques. This construct is completely incongruous to an engaged or critical pedagogy. Jo Sprague (1992) saw this and, after a strong critique of the paradigm and methods of research, called for researchers in instructional communication to take a critical approach in their scholarship and to ask some unasked questions, including how power functions in the classroom. And yet, 15 years later, there is still research that continues to incorporate both a limited definition of power and methods based in the positivist paradigm. For example, the July 2006 issue of *Communication Education* includes the article "Student perceptions of teacher power as a function of perceived teacher confirmation." Truman and Schrodt use the same narrow definition of power, and once again look at how students respond to teacher strategies, in this case, confirmation behaviors, and discount the fact that students themselves are sources of power. They see students as the target of teacher power strategies, which contradicts how Foucault (1980) sees power, "Individuals are not only its [power] inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (p. 98). Thus, Sprague's call is still largely unanswered by the majority of instructional communication researchers.

This thesis is a study that does answer Sprague's call; I cast aside the definition of power so popular in our research in favor of Foucault's more complex, dynamic understanding. In addition to framing power critically, and in response to the absence of student voice in the literature, this study focused on power from the perspective of students. My research questions were designed to gain an understanding of how power

functions in the classroom according to students; specifically, through these questions I sought to discover how students understand power, how they experience it in academic settings, and how their experiences of power outside the classroom inform their in-class communicative choices.

### *How Findings Address Research Questions*

Participant responses offered a vision of power from the perspective of students and GTAs. Their responses indicate that the extant research on power in the classroom does not accurately reflect what influences and inspires student participation in the classroom. While their articulations of power do correspond to the limited definition used in the literature, participant shares suggest that factors outside the classroom do, in fact, contribute to the communicative choice they make in the classroom. In the following section, I report how participant responses address each research question, as well as discuss emergent issues.

#### *Definitions of Power & Resistance*

Responses to research questions one and four, which asked undergraduates and GTAs to define power, indicate the predominance of the "power as possession" paradigm among both undergraduate and GTA focus group participants. This understanding is consistent with the majority of power in the classroom research in instructional communication. Participants mainly see power in hierarchically structured relationships, associate it with authority and control, and connect it to image. Further, the majority believe power is a negative phenomenon in that it can be and, according to participant responses, often is abused. As examples of experiences of power, most participants

shared situations in which one individual or group is subservient to and dominated by another individual or group. Specific examples include the teacher/student and parent/child relationship in which the participant, as student or child, was in the subservient role. However, participants do not see these roles as static; rather they see that power shifts when their roles change based on the situation in which they find themselves. For example, while participants feel they have less power in the role of student or daughter/son, they experience having more power when in the role of mother, elder sibling, or older relative.

Based on their understandings of power, focus group members see resistance as a natural response to its effects, particularly when they perceive they are being controlled. Thus, participants define resistance as opposition and defiance in response to oppressive or controlling acts. In some cases, participants see resistance as a type of power itself. For example, participants believe that a person or group standing up for what s/he/they believe in is an act of power. In these cases, participants see exercises of resistance as positive expressions of power as well as courageous acts.

The way participants defined power and resistance indicates that predominant discourses on power continue to cast it as a possession or tool used to control. In the classroom, this means teachers are the ones "with" power and students those "without" it. Subsequently, students are resisters of teacher power. This understanding creates a relationship of opposition, yet students have no means available to change it; they are not equipped with what Shor (1996) refers to as "the discourse habits suitable for reconstituting power relations" (p.20). Apparently, neither are teachers; they are also

influenced by the predominant discourses on power. Teachers are provided with strategies to keep students on task and performing in the classroom. Based on the results of this study, these strategies alone do not motivate student learning. Also, teachers are not necessarily free to incorporate critical approaches in the classroom, even if they want to, especially in an educational system that puts more import on student test scores than educating the individual student. Apple (1982) argues that the forced curricula and goals to which a teacher must adhere are a reason her/his focus has shifted from teaching to classroom management. Unless teachers are able to use critical methods, students will not learn to be "their own agents for social change" (Shor, 1987, p. 48). According to Giroux (1992), students will have no control over the "conditions of knowledge production and acquisition" (p. 224).

*Experiences of Power and Resistance in School*

Responses to research questions two and five, which asked undergraduates and GTAs to share experiences of power and resistance in educational settings, indicate that, while students articulate their experiences in language defining power as a possession and tool used to control, the actual experiences frame power in a more complex way. This is another example of how participants do not have an alternate language with which they can describe power, thus, their language continues to maintain that power is a possession. Based on their experiences, in general, participants see power as a relational force that permeates various aspects of their educational lives and exerts control over them. How participants experienced power varied based on their individual backgrounds. Factors influencing participant experiences of power include whether the student attended a

public or private school, an urban or suburban school, as well as the socio-economic level of the school district. While they have diverse experiences of power, most participants agree that power is expressed by distinct entities within a school; students, administrators, staff, teachers, and even the physical structure of the school itself exert some sort of power. According to participant responses, students who "have" power include athletes and popular students; athletes have power because they are able to receive some form of preferential treatment, e.g. getting a higher grade than actually earned or being allowed to leave a closed campus at lunch. Participants believe popular students have power because they control student events on campus, as well as have relationships with teachers that allow them to get into special classes.

Participants see the administration as another source of power, which in high school includes the principal, teachers, and staff. Of these, the principal is the most powerful as s/he can suspend a student if s/he gets into trouble. Staff includes security guards, who can also get students into trouble, as well as grant special privileges such as leaving campus during school hours. Finally, while participants perceive teachers to have some power on campus, most believe that, overall, they don't have all that much of it. The assignment of grades is the strongest indicator of a teacher's power. It is interesting that participants believe that high school teachers have more power over the grade in that they grade subjectively, whereas, according to participants, college teachers grade based on clear, objective criteria. A few focus group members believe that teachers have absolute power; several referred to teachers' use of power as unquestionable and likened their total control in the classroom to a dictatorship. Participants see such control by a

teacher as an abuse of power. They also believe teachers abuse power when they attempt to impose their own beliefs and ideas on to students.

Participant experiences of power and resistance in school reflect that, although they all shared personal examples of resisting in school, in general, they feel mostly powerless in educational settings, hence, when they did resist they did so passively. When they do resist, they resist what they perceive to be "the system," rules they don't agree with, and teachers in the classroom. Passive resistance includes not engaging in class discussions or doing homework assignments, complaining about a teacher with other students, and skipping classes. Cases of active resistance include students uniting to try to change a situation or rule, active attempts to "work around the system," and blatant defiance of a teacher in the classroom.

Participant experiences indicate that, not only do they believe they don't have power in the classroom, they also feel like, unless part of a specific group such as student athletes or popular kids, they don't have power anywhere else in the school either. All of their examples of power and resistance in an educational setting suggest that they feel oppressed by and occasionally resist the disciplinary forces within the school. They are, in fact, what Foucault (1977) calls "docile bodies," bodies that, through discipline, are "manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (p. 136). Foucault explains that discipline both increases and limits the body's forces. Through its capacity to contribute to the economy, the body's forces increase and because it is must obey discipline, those same forces are reduced. According to Foucault, discipline

> dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude,' a 'capacity,' which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (p. 138)

In the case of students, through the discipline of the school system they graduate; once they complete their education, they are then able to contribute to the economy. As students, as well as adult citizens, they are subjected to disciplinary control mechanisms which reduce the forces of the body.

While it may not be intentional, instructional communication research on power in the classroom focuses on the disciplinary nature of power and, as such, situates students as "docile bodies" that are easily manipulated by a teacher's use of power strategies. Critical pedagogy and research in critical communication pedagogy seeks to expose and ultimately change the unjust relationship between teacher and students that is perpetuated when students are cast as subservient to a dominant teacher, as in the instructional communication literature.

*Experiences That Inform Student In-Class Participation & Resistance*

Responses to research question three, "What experiences with power outside the classroom inform student participation and resistance in the classroom?" indicate that experiences outside of an academic setting do, in fact, contribute to the in-class expressions of power and resistance. Participants' experiences growing up, including in their families, in their neighborhoods, and experiences with authority, shape their understanding and perception of power relationships and determine whether or not they will attempt to resist in the classroom. The way an individual is raised, the values

instilled in her/him also influence her/his motivation to do well in school. These are factors that "power in the classroom" research does not take into account. As long as student histories are not included in research into power in the classroom, the findings will continue to misrepresent student communicative choices as direct responses to the teacher's assertion of her/his power.

*Experiences That Inform GTA Pedagogy*

Research question six asked about GTAs' experiences with power outside the classroom and how those inform their pedagogical practices and responses to student resistance in the classroom. GTAs agreed with undergraduates that their experiences of power and resistance outside the classroom definitely contribute to their in class communicative choices as students. Those experiences external to academia also affect the pedagogical choices GTAs make in the classroom, particularly past experiences with authority. However, the experiences that most influence their teaching style are those within the classroom. Past teachers who inspired them affect how they approach teaching, as do those teachers who they in no way want to emulate. GTAs shared that many of their pedagogical choices are made based on educational theory they studied. All GTAs shared that they choose pedagogical strategies that will engage students and offer them choices. They also all shared that they want to make a difference in the lives of their students, and this has a great influence on the pedagogical choices they make.

## *Implications*

Findings of this study support Sprague's critique of the prevailing instructional communication research on power in the classroom; specifically that the research

paradigm forces a very narrow definition and understanding of power. Focusing on power as a tool teachers use to get students to comply suggests that all student in-class responses are directly attributable to teacher power strategies. Indeed, the power in the classroom research does attribute student response directly to teacher implementation of BATs and BAMs. This misinterpretation of student resistance and motivation creates an oppositional relationship between teacher and student and elides the myriad factors outside of the classroom that actually contribute to the decisions students make.

The choices students make in the classroom are not simply due to a particular BAT or BAM a teacher employs; rather, factors such as upbringing, culture, personal values and beliefs, educational goals, self-perception, and past experiences with authority all contribute to how a student communicates in the classroom and her/his motivation to do well in the class. This is not to say that teachers don't motivate students; they absolutely do. However, the findings of this study indicate that using particular BATs or BAMs is not what motivates students. What does contribute to student motivation is teacher attitude and relationship with her/his students. A teacher who demonstrates that s/he cares significantly influences student motivation. Teacher immediacy behaviors, which are ways a teacher can appear to care, are manipulation; teachers incorporate immediacy techniques in order to gain compliance. Participants do not equate these techniques with a teacher truly caring for her/his students. Rather, participants believe a teacher cares about students when s/he engages and listens to student opinions, questions, and input about the course. When unsolicited, student opinions, questions, and input into course content are what instructional communication research labels "resistance

behavior." The fact that instructional communication uses the term "resistance" for such behaviors is a problem. As long as student responses that seek to question and inquire are considered in this way, the student is framed in opposition to the teacher.

We need to start seeing students and teachers in a more productive and reciprocal relationship. In such a relationship, participants feel they have power, and the teacher can also significantly influence student motivation. Several participants talked about how they prefer teachers who treat them as adults, as equals. For example, Max F said, "It's easier to learn when there's a teacher who will be on your level rather than somebody who is domineering" (undergraduate group, 11/28/06). This type of relationship is what both Freire and Foucault advocate. The teacher is not there to dominate students, rather, both parties have something to contribute and take away from the relationship. It is in this type of reciprocal relationship, one in which a real rapport is established, that teachers can have an affect on student motivation. This type of relationship, according to participants in this study, is more influential and a stronger indicator of student responses that any BAT or BAM a teacher employs.

Finally, as long as research perpetuates an oppositional relationship between teacher and student and defines power as simply a compliance gaining tool, students themselves will continue to carry that understanding and experience with them into their lives outside academia. How they view government, the family, and work relationships will reflect a limited understanding of power, and they will remain "passive resisters" rather than actively engaging in democratic society. It is no coincidence that the current generation of young adults appears apathetic towards politics and government and does

not believe they have the power to make a difference. As Princess said, "We ain't got no power, if we had power stuff would be going the way we want it to go and I'd have my health insurance, that's not the way we want it to be" (undergraduate group, 11/27/06). Seeing students as powerless objects in our classrooms should not be the way we, as educators, want it to be either. Rather, we can take great care to see the complete human beings seated in our classrooms and attempt to engage them in the learning process. We can, as hooks (1994) described, see teaching as sacred.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

All of the undergraduate participants in this study were my students; each GTA who volunteered for this study is a colleague, and in some cases, a friend. Some may argue that my prior relationship with the participants is a limitation of this study; since the participants were my students and GTA colleagues, perhaps their responses were based more on trying to please me than on honestly answering the questions. I do not feel this is the case, however. The questions were all open-ended and the study was framed as simply wanting to get student and GTA perspectives on power. And, since I did know all the participants prior to the focus groups, an atmosphere of trust and safety in the groups was quickly and easily established, and thus participants readily shared their personal stories about power.

Another possible limitation is the sample size; a total of thirty-one students and GTAs participated in six focus groups. Perhaps the findings would be significantly different if the sample size were larger. Again, I don't see this as a limitation since my purpose was to look at how power functions in the classroom from the perspective of the

student, and my methodology was chosen specifically because it would allow me to get student understandings about power in their own words. And, generalizing my findings to a broad population of students was expressly *not* the purpose of this study.

The purpose of this study was to introduce student perceptions of power into the extant research on the subject, which is the primary strength of the study. That this study focuses on student perceptions of power based on their own definitions and experiences is a strength because it is the only study to do so; no other instructional communication research includes students in this way, nor does literature in critical pedagogy. And, although critical communication pedagogy scholars have definitely included the student in their research; the literature to date does not include sustained engagement with the topic of power.

The design of this study encouraged students to share their understandings of power and resistance in order to add their voices to the conversation about power. As such, the study has unearthed what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledge;" the "non-scientific," "naïve" knowledge of the student. Foucault terms this type of knowledge "subjugated" because it is typically omitted from predominant discourse in a field of study. In the instructional communication and communication education fields, the knowledge of the student has indeed been subjugated and this study contributes to rectifying that omission.

### *Directions for Future Research*

In addition to bringing the voice of the student into the conversation on power, this study illuminates areas upon which future research should focus. This study supports

Sprague's argument that the predominant research paradigm in instructional communication is insufficient to fully understand power; thus, just as Sprague advocates, communication researchers must continue to problematize the narrow understanding of power that pervades the literature in our field. Future research should continue to incorporate a critical perspective in order to more fully understand power and its effects.

The findings also indicate that how we talk about power affects how students understand it; therefore future research should include a rhetorical study that explores how our discourse on power affects the ways students understand and articulate it, as well as how that understanding affects student participation in the classroom and in society. Also, how does the discourse affect a teacher's understanding of power, and how does that understanding affect pedagogical choices in the classroom?

In addition, future research can expand the present study to include conversations with professors/lecturers and high school teachers as well as students. Also, an extended study incorporating an ethnographic component would allow actual in-class communication and interactions to be observed and compared with interview data. These observations and interviews should take place across a variety of contexts and disciplines.

Finally, research into power in the classroom can include autoethnography. Autoethnography is a narrative approach to scholarly writing that seeks to explore the personal and everyday experiences of the researcher, and how those experiences can help elucidate complex communication interactions and their cultural implications. Ellis & Bochner (2003) describe autoethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the

cultural" (p. 209); according to Fassett & Warren (2007), autoethnography can be understood as "writing that creates scholarly truth and knowledge in stories about our own lives" (p. 14). Autoethnography is about including ourselves in our scholarship. Autoethnography does not provide obvious, concrete, or linear understanding, rather it "orchestrates fragments of awareness – apprehended/projected and recalled/reconstructed – into narratives and alternative text forms which (re)present events and other social actors as they are evoked from a changeable and contestable self" (Crawford, 1996, p. 167). As such, autoethnography is a narrative in which the researcher weaves together these "fragments of awareness" into stories that help the researcher, and the reader, to more deeply and personally understand the subject under investigation, in this case, power.

As educators, autoethnography provides a means to understand the effects of our own lives on those of our students; it allows us to explore the ways our pedagogical strategies and understandings of power help to shape classroom communication, to identify our own prejudices and biases and their affect on classroom dynamics; and to better understand how our experiences determine the way we interact with our students as well and their responses to us. Through autoethnography, a teacher can describe what actually happens in the classroom based on her/his pedagogical choices. What happens when power is understood as distributed instead of possessed? What happens when a teacher understands that "Knowledge and ideas are dynamic and co-experienced instead of static and transmitted" (Conquergood, 1993, p. 339)? What happens when a teacher

establishes a relationship with her/his students in which both participate in and contribute to the educational process? Autoethnography can address these questions.

Although my suggestions for future research clearly advocate for variety in our methods of studying power, I am not just arguing for plurality of methods in our research into power. What I am suggesting is that we cannot continue to perpetuate the narrow view of power that permeates instructional communication literature. What we must do, as educators, is gain a deeper understanding of power as well as its consequences for students, teachers, and institutions. The classroom is not a space impervious to outside influence; it is not a Petri dish or laboratory in which variables can be isolated to test their affects on other variables. This is, however, how the extant power in the classroom research sets it up; the classroom is a space isolated from societal, cultural, sexual, political, and other influences. We need to conduct research that reflects the truly complex, dynamic, fluid world in which we live. If not, we will fill the shelves with nicely conducted studies that don't reflect reality or do anything to further understand the effects of power on ourselves and our students.

### *Final Thoughts*

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I attempted to incorporate critical communication pedagogy in my classroom. I tried to establish environments in which students felt free to share their ideas and opinions, ask questions, and engage with the material. I attempted, as Freire advocates, to include students in the process of their own education by encouraging and actively eliciting their suggestions for activities, assignments, and the format of final exams. And, I incorporated student suggestions that

supported their ability to meet course objectives. I tried to see students as complex individuals whose life experiences shape their identities and in-class responses. Finally, I reflected on my own experiences and attitudes in the classroom.

The responses from students left me both inspired and disheartened. At first, many students resisted taking an active role in the class; many seemed happier to just sit back and let me spew information for an hour. Shor (1996) experienced the same type of student resistance when he tried to implement a more democratic approach to his teaching. There were some students who seemed to genuinely appreciate the efforts I made, and their active participation made the atmosphere more dynamic as well as stimulated learning for all. Although at times difficult, frustrating, and exhausting, I will continue to approach teaching with a critical eye; I will attempt to see students as participants in their own education, and actively create ways for them to do so. If I can make a difference with one student, then I will have achieved my goals.

*Paula*

She burst into the classroom like a storm, backpack carelessly slung over her shoulder, one arm akimbo, the other holding a cell phone, abject disdain all over her face. It didn't matter that she was twenty minutes late to the first class of the semester, or that I was in the middle of leading a discussion on the various definitions of communication. She walked directly in front of me, head held high, eyes avoiding mine, and headed to the row farthest from the door. "Attitude" I thought, "this girl's got serious attitude." I worried that she would be a problem (indeed, after I shared my challenging first day experiences with "one of my students," my fellow GTAs and I nicknamed her my

"problem child"). I decided not to address her lateness or disruptive entrance because I didn't want to create an uncomfortable situation for my students or for myself (perhaps my desire to remain "comfortable" was the stronger motivator in my decision), instead I simply said, "Welcome to COMM40" and continued on with the discussion.

The next class session "Paula" made a similar entrance, this time only 10 minutes late. At some point during the class, she began talking on her cell phone. I knew there were several ways I could handle the situation. The first, and perhaps easiest, was to directly confront her behavior and ask her to hang up and stop disrupting the class; however I did not want to assume the role of classroom disciplinarian and I did not want to further alienate her. Also, I saw her behavior as a test. Paula is an African American female and I am a white female; based on this, I believe she was trying to get me to call her out, to discipline her in some way, to fit me into her own stereotype. Even though I already stereotyped her on the first day, I didn't want to play that game. She hung up and I decided to skip to the class code of conduct activity that I had planned for a bit later in the session. In the code of conduct activity, groups come up with ideas for how they want the class to be and then the points everyone agrees on become the official class code of conduct. I figured that students would more than likely address the cell phone issue themselves. Sure enough, "cell phones silenced" was one of the agreements the class made. From that day on, I decided that I would call out Paula; however it would be to elicit her participation in the class discussions. At first, whenever I called on her directly, Paula only offered minimal, one or two word responses, which is pretty much what I expected. Based on my stereotype, I decided that she wasn't all that bright. At some

point in the beginning of the semester, something changed; she began to voluntarily participate in class discussions, though at times it was tough to understand all she said due to her dialect and the vernacular she used.

As the semester progressed, I got to know more about Paula. She grew up in what could accurately be called a ghetto; in her first speech, she argued that not enough was being done to curb youth violence in Oakland. She knew kids who were killed on the street. Gangs and drugs were part of her daily life; no wonder she had an attitude. Paula was, in fact, a smart young woman, a fact elided by her dialect and appearance. Because of these, I decided that she must not be a "good" student. Once my stereotype was blown, I could see the effort she started to put forth in the class. She came to my office hours with questions about her outlines and speeches; she clearly wanted to do well. By the end of the semester I saw a pretty dramatic transformation in her. Her derisive looks and attitude changed and underneath there was a vulnerable and funny young woman who was just trying to make it, against some intense odds. I can see that had I initially exercised the power of my role as teacher by disciplining her, I would have been just another example to confirm her belief and stereotype of teachers and done nothing to support her learning. Although it may have taken a bit of extra time, trying to get to know Paula and her circumstances helped me to adapt my teaching so that she was better able to learn and participate in the classroom.

My experience with Paula taught me the importance of incorporating critical communication pedagogy into my teaching—particularly reflexivity, which is an important aspect of critical communication pedagogy; reflecting on and questioning our

pedagogical choices, decisions, and actions in the classroom. Also, my experience with Paula confirms that race matters; part of the tension between us was racial–there is no way to remove the fact of her blackness and my whiteness from the experience. In the beginning, I just wanted Paula to go away. She was the first student that challenged me and brought my own biases and prejudices to the forefront. If I simply let those biases and prejudices go unacknowledged, had I not consciously reflected on how they were keeping me from effectively teaching Paula, I would be the teacher she apparently thought I was on the first day of class. Instead, I realized that I was seeing her through the lens of a stereotype I had of a young, black female from the kind of neighborhood she was from. I actually labeled her a "problem," something that I am strongly against and have decried others for doing. Clearly, those first few class sessions I was not practicing what I preached. It is one thing to talk about caring for students, and another to actually do it. Thankfully, when I saw what I was doing, the labeling and stereotyping, I was able to let it go and focus back on teaching. I was able to see Paula as a young woman with an intense background, who was smart, and, if given a chance, would contribute to the class. This shift allowed me to better serve Paula, which in turn made the entire class more engaging.

Paula's experience with me may not be as significant as my experience with her has been; I am sure she still struggles against the odds, and face teachers who fit her stereotypes and who stereotype her. My experience with Paula has helped me grow as both a person and a teacher. That I was able to get beyond my own biases and engage Paula in the classroom confirms that the pedagogy I incorporate in the classroom matters.

My goal as a teacher is to engage students in ways that allow them to offer their own unique voice to the class. I saw a transformation in Paula; however, I feel I am the one who has been transformed. This transformation is why I teach.

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# APPENDIX A: IRB Approval to Conduct Focus Group Research

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***Associate Vice President***
***Graduate Studies & Research***

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To: Karen Williams
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Cupertino, CA 95014

From: Pamela Stacks, Ph.D. Per Pamela Stacks
Associate Vice President
Graduate Studies and Research

Date: July 17, 2006

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"A critical look at power in the classroom"

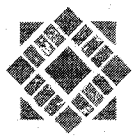
This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Pamela Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subject's portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond July 13, 2007 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc. Deanna Fassett, HGH 211-0112

# APPENDIX B: Agreement to Participate in Research



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**Agreement to Participate in Research**

**Responsible Investigator:** Karen M. Williams
**Title of Protocol**: A critical look at power in the classroom

You have been invited to participate in a research study investigating the ways students and teachers understand and experience power and resistance, and how these experiences influence their perceptions of power in the classroom.

You will be asked to participate in at least one focus group interview discussion which will last approximately 90 minutes. The focus group will be facilitated by Karen M. Williams at a time, date, and location that is mutually convenient; this discussion will be audio or videotaped. At a future date, you may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview that will be scheduled at a convenient day/time, which will also be audio taped.

While you are participating in this study, you may choose to reflect upon situations or experiences that are challenging or uncomfortable. You may also enjoy the opportunity to express and articulate your own understandings of power and resistance, and may learn from other members of the group.

Although the results of this study may be published, there will absolutely be no information that could identify you included in the final document, or in any file, notes or subsequent papers. A pseudonym will be used when audiotapes are transcribed to protect participant identity.

You will receive no monetary compensation for participating in this research study.

Questions about this research may be addressed to Karen Williams, (408) 924-5388, kwillcomm20@yahoo.com, or Dr. Deanna Fassett, (408) 924-5511, dfassett@email.sjsu.edu. Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Dennis Jaehne, Department Chair, Communication Studies, (408) 924-5360. Questions about research-related injury may be presented to Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, (408) 924-2480.

No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to "not participate" in the study.

Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study; you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies.

At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

- **The signature of a participant on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study, including being video/audio taped for the purpose of this research project.**
- **The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named participant in the research and attestation that the participant has been fully informed of her or his rights.**

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

## APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

1. What is your pseudonym? What is your year in school?
2. What does the word *power* mean to you? What images come to mind?
3. What does the word *resistance* mean to you? What images come to mind?
4. Tell me about a time when, as a student, you experienced power in a school setting. Who had the power?
5. Can you share an example of a time you experienced resistance in school? Who was resisting whom?
6. Have you, personally ever felt powerful as a student in a school setting?
7. How about resistant?
8. Can you think of any experiences you have had of power &/or resistance *outside* of school that affect the way you see power inside the classroom? Please describe these.
9. Do you think power is a good thing?
10. In a perfect world, how would the power/resistance dynamic work in the classroom?
11. Any final comments and/or reflections on the process?

### Additional Questions for Student Focus Groups

1. How have you observed or experienced a teacher using power?
2. Do you believe that teachers are powerful?

### Additional Questions for GTA Focus Groups

1. Do you feel you have power as a teacher? How do you experience this?
2. How have you experienced student resistance in your classrooms?
3. Can you think of any experiences you have had of power &/or resistance *outside* of school that affect your pedagogical choices in the classroom, and the way you handle student resistance.

### Additional Questions for Student/GTA Focus Groups

1. Have the students in the group been surprised by anything you heard today from the GTAs?
2. Have the GTAs been surprised by anything you heard from the students?